

THE
FALSE FRIEND:

A DOMESTIC STORY.

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IN FOUR VOLUMES.

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THE
FALSE FRIEND.

LETTER LXXXII.

GERTRUDE to FRANCES.

August 6, 1797.

It is impossible to describe the unruffled mien and easy *nonchalance* which Mrs. Ferret displayed during our journey of five miles: she seemed conscious of her own safety, even while she held in her possession the property of which she had defrauded me. My mind was too intently absorbed by rumination, to allow of much discourse upon the subject of my complaint; and a silence, almost

uninterrupted, gave her time to collect her defence, with that shrewdness and precaution which never failed to regulate her conduct.

In less than an hour we arrived within sight of the splendid temple, where Justice held her scales under the ermine of Nobility. The extraordinary magnificence of the mansion, the spacious park, the number of domestics in liveries laced with coronets, who ushered us from room to room, threw a chilling presentiment over my mind; and I almost repented our having undertaken the expedition. The officer who had attended us, perceiving my surprize, informed me that I might depend on receiving the most liberal treatment; "for," said he with a consequential tone, "my Lord is very polite to people of respectability; and I never fail to experience his civilities whenever I appear before him."

"Pray,"

"Pray," inquired Mrs. Ferret, "what is his Lordship's name?"

"Good woman, I answer no illegal questions," said Mr. Jenkins.

"You are mighty close indeed," cried the inquisitor: "but one never gets any thing from low people; they have ten times more cunning than persons of consequence."

"Save your speeches till you want them," interrupted Jenkins: "they will only make against you, when things come to be explained: for, by your looks, you are but a ticklish sort of a body, or I am mistaken."

"Saucy varlet!" exclaimed Mrs. Ferret. "Your master would not presume to use such language. A ticklish sort of a body, indeed! I am a woman of reputation, and not used to such vulgar impertinence; therefore let me have no more of it."

“ My Lord shall talk to you,” said Jenkins ; “ for I never demean myself by being familiar with suspected persons : I leave that to greater people. I know my situation, and shall do my duty, let what will come of it.”

“ You are an impertinent vagabond,” said Mrs. Ferret, “ and, I dare swear, sprung from nothing. Pray, how long have you been invested with the dignities of legal authority ? I have seen your face before ; and, if I mistake not, you were then a menial—”

“ Take care what you say,” interrupted Jenkins, opening his pocket-book, and beginning to write. Mrs. Ferret, regardless of his conduct, with increased vehemence continued :

“ I am come to something indeed, when every Jack in office dares insult me !”

“ A libel !” exclaimed Jenkins, still writing attentively.

“ I defy

"I defy your power," said Mrs. Ferret: "I laugh at your authority; and if my Lord encourages such insolence, I will tell him that he is no better than he should be, or I am a liar."

"I am a liar," repeated Jenkins, writing the words. Mrs. Ferret continued:

"And as for your conducting me hither, I despise it. I am above the laws."

"Above the laws," murmured Jenkins, without taking his eyes off his pencil.

"I have not been of such service to my country, to be at last suspected of dishonesty," said the prisoner. "I have kept too good a watch upon the enemies of social order, to crouch before varlets, and confess myself a culprit."

"And confess myself a culprit," muttered Jenkins.

“ When my Lord appears, we shall see who will be innocent, and who will be proved guilty : and if I do not make an example of some folks, I rely on the justice of Heaven to punish me as I deserve.”

“ Punish me as I deserve,” repeated Jenkins, writing down the words.

An hour passed in controversy, when a servant, out of livery, informed us that Lord Arcot would be at leisure in about twenty minutes. “ My Lord is engaged with his private secretary,” said the domestic, and desires that the ladies will take some refreshment after their journey.”

“ We are much obliged to his Lordship,” replied Mrs. Ferret, “ and I beg he will take his own time ; for perhaps he is occupied in affairs of importance, or we break in upon his domestic concerns. My Lord, I presume, is married.”

“ He

"He is, madam," replied the servant.

"I hope he has heirs to inherit this princely mansion," continued the prisoner.

"Mind your own business," said Jenkins, "and remember that you never get any thing from low people."

"You are a familiar jackanapes," replied Mrs. Ferret. Then turning towards the servant, she added: "Pray, who and what is this fellow, that he presumes to domineer over persons of consequence."

"When persons of consequence stoop to degrading actions, the very lowest have a right to condemn them," said Jenkins. The servant smiled, and quitted the room; and Mary and I endeavoured to beguile the time in admiring the splendours with which we were surrounded.

The apartment was hung with rose-coloured tabby, richly edged with an embroidery of flowers, in colours, upon a silver ground. The chairs and sofas were made of the same materials: in the recesses, which were lined with looking-glasses, stood vases of white marble, inlaid with gold devices of various descriptions. On the chimney two rich lustres met the eye, decorated with gems; and in the centre a basket, composed entirely of pearls, was filled with artificial flowers of exquisite beauty. The carpet was of velvet, and the sofas adorned with small pillows strongly perfumed with otto of roses. While we were engaged in admiring this temple of profusion, another servant entered the room, to request that Jenkins would attend Lord Arcot in his library. He also desired that the ladies would retire to separate apartments, till the cause of complaint should be laid before his Lordship.

Mrs.

Mrs. Ferret followed the servant ; Miss Ashgrove entered an adjoining room ; and I remained alone in the scene of enchantment. I had not been many minutes separated from my companions, when the door was opened, and Lord Arcot presented himself ; at the same moment exclaiming, “ Prodigious ! Miss St. Leger ! Is it possible ? ”

You will by this time perceive, my dear Frances, that the newly-made peer was no other than my old tormentor, Sir Hector Upas. My consternation was unutterable. His Lordship observed it, and taking my hand with more freedom than delicacy, he added, “ I am prodigiously delighted to find you at liberty, after what happened at Edgware ; and I now hope that the vicissitudes of adversity have taught you to know your friends from your enemies.”

“The task is difficult, my Lord,” said I, “while ostentation can so plausibly assume the semblance of generosity.” Lord Arcot looked somewhat disconcerted; but, in a few moments recovering from his chagrin, he again addressed me:

“By the character of the person who is your companion, I conclude that you are a prisoner; that your crime is of a dangerous nature; and that you are in rather a perilous situation. Now, as I am disposed to render you some service in this disagreeable dilemma, I trust that, in return for my kindness, you will at least be grateful.”

“Your good intentions I acknowledge most readily,” said I: “but you are altogether mistaken respecting the motive of my visit. I am the injured person; the accuser, not the accused.”

“Pro-

"Prodigious!" exclaimed Lord Arcot: "then who is criminal? Somebody must be guilty, or Jenkins would not be your companion."

"The woman, whose name is Ferret, has defrauded me of several valuable trinkets, and robbed me of papers that are more precious than my existence."

"Of papers!" said Lord Arcot, contracting his brows, and stroking his chin. "What species of papers?"

"Of the most interesting," answered I; "such as must determine my happiness or misery for ever."

"I comprehend you clearly," said Lord Arcot: "they contained opinions too enlarged, and too freely expressed, for the safety of the writer in these times of suspicion:"

"Pardon me, my Lord: they were not of a political nature," interrupted I,

"By whom were they written?"

"I cannot tell."

"To whom?" said Lord Arcot.

"I do not know," answered I.

"Prodigiously singular!" cried his Lordship, again settling his features into an inquisitorial severity.

"How many papers were there in the packet?"

"I cannot say. I never opened it."

• "To whom were they addressed?"

"To her whom they may concern."

"How came they into Mrs. Ferret's possession?"

"From an unknown hand."

"Then by what right do you claim them as your property?"

"They once were mine; but through a combination of events, I lost them."

"I thought you said that you did not know their contents," cried Lord Arcot.

"Your evidence is prodigiously equivocal: but I am still disposed to serve you, if you will be grateful."

"My

“My Lord, I require nothing but justice, such as the laws will allow, and the injuries I have sustained demand.”

“Justice has nothing to do with private friendship,” replied Lord Arcot. “Your retribution will depend on your own conduct. I have, not far off, a small house, retired and convenient: thither I counsel you to go: I will question the offender, and wait on you in a few hours with the result of her examination.” Then pointing from the window towards a neat white cottage on the skirts of a rising forest, not more than a mile distant, he informed me, that was the chosen spot. “There,” said he, “you may in safety await my decision; and you may depend both on my zeal and my friendship, that it shall be in *your* favour.”

“My Lord, I do not comprehend you,” said I: “the favour you would bestow,

bestow, if it be incompatible with justice, I disdain to accept ; I demand an immediate investigation of the business. If I have accused the woman wrongfully, let me suffer the humiliation which will attend my error. If she is guilty, I require that she be punished."

" Why, look ye, Miss St. Leger," replied Lord Arcot, " Mrs. Ferret is no stranger to me : she is a very useful and a very valuable member of society. Her vigilance is rather commendable than faulty ; and in these times the sharper we look out the better. The papers, by your own confession, have a very mysterious tendency. They came from nobody knows whom ; they were written nobody can tell for what ; and they were also addressed to nobody : therefore, till it can be proved whom they concern, nobody has a right to claim them. This being the case, they
may

may as well be deemed her property, as yours, or mine, or any body's, for aught I can see to the contrary."

This wise argument evinced the judgment and discrimination of the noble Peer, and I could scarcely refrain from smiling; but Lord Arcot lost nothing of his consequential mien, as he uttered his sagacious decision; while I stood before him, mute with disappointment.

After a short reverie, I rang the bell, and desired a servant to inform my companions, that Lord Arcot was ready to receive them. The message was conveyed as I requested; and in a few minutes Miss Ashgrove, Mrs. Ferret, and Mr. Jenkins, entered the apartment. By the intelligent looks which passed between Lord Arcot and the prisoner, I anticipated a decision in her favour; at the same time that I observed her glancing revenge and indignation incessantly

incessantly towards the unsuspecting Jenkins.

Lord Arcot, finding me resolute in my purpose, and vexed beyond his patience at my conduct, now began to interrogate Mrs. Ferret. Her answers were artfully evasive. She lamented that the papers were lost, because she did not question their great political importance. She expatiated largely on the dangers to which she was exposed for her enthusiastic loyalty ; and, while she execrated the spirit of discontent which hourly spread its baneful influence over the universe, she could not help pitying those deluded mortals, who busied themselves in affairs which should be governed only by the highest and the wisest of the human race ! This speech was uttered in an inflated tone, and accompanied by an inclination of the head, which proved that the compliment was intended for
Lord

Lord Arcot : and as flattery, even from the base, is acceptable to little minds, the weight of this laboured panegyric caused the scale of justice to preponderate in her favour.

Mrs. Ferret, availing herself of the propitious moment, now directed the artillery of revenge against poor Jenkins. " My Lord," said she, taking the lacquey of the law most illegally by the collar, " this jackall, this vagabond, this staff-bearing, heel-hunting, knave-scaring varlet, has treated me most indignantly."

" My Lord, she has wickedly and feloniously robbed this young lady of sundry valuables," said Jenkins, bowing obsequiously. " She is an extortioner and an impostor, and deserves to be sent to jail, my Lord, if there is such a thing as law against vagrants."

" That is as I please," said Lord Arcot. " Who taught you to judge
upon

upon matters of such importance ? What have you to do but to obey the commands of your superiors ? If such fellows as you begin to talk, what will become of the higher orders ?”

“ My Lord, she called me a menial.”

“ Well, and what then : this is a land of liberty, and every subject is free to speak.”

“ So I said, my Lord,” interrupted Jenkins ; “ but she would not hear me ; and if I was born in a land of liberty, why am I to be silenced any more than my betters ? Great folks, like your Lordship, that want nothing, have no occasion to grumble : but if you pinch a pig, why, he’ll squeak ; and by the same rule, so would your Lordship.”

“ Jenkins, have a care what you say,” cried Lord Arcot. “ You shall find that I am a friend to subordination, Jenkins ; and that I never countenance informers :
besides,

besides, Jenkins, you know that I set my face against freedom of speech."

"Then I don't wonder at your frightening folks into silence," replied the honest fellow: "but what would you say, my Lord, if I called you a vagabond and a varlet, and set you at defiance?"

"Prove your words," cried Mrs. Ferret contemptuously.

"And so I will," said Jenkins, taking out his pocket-book, and presenting it to Lord Arcot: "there is my defence," said he, "and I will stand to it, let what will betide me." Lord Arcot opened the leaf, and with an audible voice read these lines:

"I am a liar—above the laws—and confess myself a culprit—punish me as I deserve."

"Jenkins! Jenkins! what is this I see?" exclaimed Lord Arcot. "A confession of guilt under your own hand."

The

The simple constable, alarmed for his personal safety, now forgot the object of his accusation, and with all the humility of conscious error, entreated that Lord Arcot would dismiss the matter: but his chapter of perplexities was verging to a climax; for on my again demanding my jewels from Mrs. Ferret, she boldly denied the charge, and, without hesitation, declared that she entertained no doubt but Jenkins was the person who had stolen them.

The poor fellow was nearly overwhelmed with rage and resentment. His colour changed; his whole frame trembled. "Mark his countenance," cried Mrs. Ferret: "see how pale he looks: I would venture to bet my existence, that he is guilty." Lord Arcot rang the bell, and a servant entered the room. "Search that fellow," said his Lordship. Jenkins was too much surprised

surprised to resist; till, in a few moments, the watch and jewels were produced from his coat-pocket."

"Prodigious!" exclaimed Lord Arcot.

"You see, my Lord, what degree of dependence may be placed on Miss St. Leger's evidence," said Mrs. Ferret with an exulting smile; while the astonished Jenkins seemed petrified with horror. At this instant we were startled by a sudden shriek from Miss Ashgrove, who had, during the examination, taken her seat near the balcony-window. I flew towards her; but she had sunk back in her chair, and was, to appearance, lifeless. The cause of this alarming event was unknown to all present, excepting herself, and she was incapable of revealing it. My terror was only to be equalled by my sorrow: I assisted Lord Arcot in conveying her to the sofa; and, by the fixed paleness of her

countenance, I concluded that her scene of sorrow was now closed for ever. Several efforts were ineffectually made to renew the suspended circulation ; till with the aid of two female servants, in a short time after, Mary was, by Lord Arcot's request, removed to a chamber.

I now inquired whether Lady Arcot was in the house ; for I longed ardently to see her, and to claim once more those proofs of generous protection, which I had experienced at different periods of my existence. The servant informed me that her Ladyship was gone to visit a friend, who resided only a few miles from Arcot-Hall ; and that she was expected home to dinner : this intelligence consoled me, while I experienced the additional satisfaction of once more hearing the voice, and beholding the opening eyes of the amiable Mary.

A torrent of tears recalled that animation which only subjected her heart
to

to a more acute sense of agony. Ah, Frances ! how desirable is that moment which terminates the miseries of existence : how vain, how useless is the shield of Reason, when it covers a breast that is devoted to misfortune !

I entreated Miss Ashgrove to compose her mind as much as possible, and assured her that she had every thing gentle and benignant to expect from the attentions of Lady Arcot. " Let us instantly depart," said she : " let us fly from a trial which will master all my fortitude."

" To-morrow we will proceed on our journey," answered I.

" To-morrow will be too late ; this night I must be gone. Oh, Gertrude !" added she, with a look strongly expressive of mental agony, " I have seen the barbarous, the ungrateful Somerton."

" Heavens !" is it possible ?" said I, starting from her pillow.

" He

“ He passed beneath the balcony on horseback ; and turning short round the right wing of the house, I scarcely convinced my senses that they were not deceived, before I again lost sight of him. Gertrude, how shall I describe the sensations of my heart, while astonishment overpowered the recollection of his past unkindness.” While she spoke, the chamber-door was softly opened by Lady Arcot’s *femme de chambre*, who came to inform us that her Ladyship’s groom had brought a verbal message, saying she should not return till late in the evening. I now conjured Miss Ashgrove to tranquillize her mind ; sent my excuses for remaining during the rest of the day in the chamber of my friend ; and just as the neighbouring village clock strikes twelve, I close my long letter with an assurance of unalterable friendship.

LETTER LXXXIII.

The Same to the Same.

August 10, 1797.

THE hours till morning stole on in extreme anxiety: Mary was feverish and restless; she frequently attempted to speak of Somerton; but the convulsive perturbation which attended the effort as often compelled her to relinquish it. As soon as the dawn appeared, notwithstanding her feeble and exhausted state, she proposed setting out for Bristol; and I assured her that the moment I could obtain an interview with Lady Arcot, and make my acknowledgments to her husband for the asylum they had afforded us, I would readily and zealously attend her.

At nine o'clock I sent a message to her Ladyship, informing her that I was impatient for the pleasure of an interview ; and that, as soon as she quitted her chamber, I would fly to embrace her. The servant departed with alacrity ; and I dressed myself as speedily as possible, eagerly hoping once more to see a friend, so valued and so respected.

I waited for Lady Arcot's answer with the utmost impatience. Half an hour elapsed, but no summons either relieved my anxiety or gratified my feelings. A variety of conjectures employed my thoughts during this tedious interval. Surely, thought I, the amiable, the generous Lady Upas is not changed by the dazzling height to which she has been exalted ; she is too nobly-minded, too liberal, to assume a consequence from adventitious honours, or
to

to display a profusion of dignities and fortune merely for the pleasure of humbling the unhappy. She is not one of those beings who pride themselves upon the blessings they enjoy, merely because they afford them the means of triumphing over the victims of oppression; or who, wrapped in the soft garb of ease or affluence, pretend to censure those less favoured, but more illustrious natures, which are awake to all the claims of feeling and generosity.

Another hour passed without my receiving any message from Lady Arcot; and I again rang the bell, to know whether she had yet quitted her chamber. The same servant who had delivered my message re-entered the room; but her manner was totally changed since I had last seen her. The eager alacrity, the overacted zeal of obsequious attention, had wholly vanished; and in its place, looks marked by contempt,

with words briefly and peevishly uttered, excited my astonishment.

“ Well, what a ringing you keep ?” said the impertinent woman. “ Why don’t you come down to breakfast ? it has been waiting long enough, God knows.”

“ Has Lady Arcot quitted her chamber ?”

“ Long ago,” replied the Abigail ; “ and has been out on horseback more than an hour.”

“ Did you deliver my message to her Ladyship ?” said I.

“ To be sure I did ; and she said there was no answer required.”

“ Does Lady Arcot know who I am, and the cause of my making her this visit ?”

“ O, yes ; my Lady knows you well enough ; but she does not desire to see you : for she wondered what business my Lord had to offer you a bed without

her knowledge ; and said that there were inns and lodgings enough in the neighbourhood, without making such a rumpus in our family. And, to tell you the truth, I am of my Lady's opinion ; for such visitors are more plague than profit at any time."

I was overwhelmed with chagrin and mortification. " For Heaven's sake, let us go immediately," said Miss Ashgrove.

" Aye, you had better set out soon," said the epitome of unfeeling greatness ; " for I told my Lady that you was dangerously ill, and she said that she would not have you die in her house for all the universe."

" Merciful God ! is it possible that the petty distinctions of rank can so degenerate the human soul ?" said I. " Can a bauble, added to the tinsel ensigns of Nobility, dazzle the eyes of thinking and enlightened beings, per-

vert their natures, and, while they fancy themselves exalted, hurl them to a level even with the basest?"

"Think no more of it," said Mary, taking my hand, as she feebly rose from her bed: "the virtues of your mind, Gertrude, will tower above such reptiles; and I only lament, that on my account you have been exposed to such humiliations."

"You have exposed yourself," said the Abigail, "in attempting to wrong so worthy a woman as Mrs. Ferret, by your trumped-up story about your jewels and your improbable nonsense. My Lady knows Mrs. Ferret, and has a great esteem for her; and wonders at your effrontery in daring to accuse her of such infamous conduct. But your malice has recoiled upon yourself: for Mrs. Ferret had written a letter, and recommended you to my Lady as a travelling companion on her journey to Italy; and
had

had you not forfeited her protection, she would have taken you into her service."

I now remembered Mrs. Ferret's proposal, and found a new source of sorrow; while I reflected, that every scheme of happiness, which had presented propitious prospects, failed at the moment when they appeared most flattering.

"Will Lady Arcot return soon?" said I, again addressing her *femme de chambre*.

"That is quite uncertain," answered she: "my Lady always rides two or three hours before dinner, and sometimes does not return till the evening. You need not wait; for it is ten to one that you cannot see her, come when she will. My Lady is very cautious who she admits to her presence, and particularly when people come thrusting themselves into the house without an invitation."

" I suppose I can see Lord Arcot," said I.

" That is not my business," replied the woman. " My department is about my Lady's person : I have no concerns with my Lord."

" Is Mr. Somerton still in the house ?" inquired Miss Ashgrove with a voice feeble and faltering.

" No : he always attends my Lady in her morning rides ; she seldom goes any where without him." Mary's pale cheek was faintly flushed ; and, with quivering lips, she inquired, " How long has he been a visitor ?"

" Not many days : Mr. Somerton has been very ill, and confined to his chamber in London. My Lady went twice to town on purpose to see him ; for he thinks that there is not such a woman in the world as my Lady Arcot."

" Indeed !"

“ Indeed !” cried Mary in a tone scarcely audible. “ And he purposes remaining here some time longer ?”

“ He will stay till the family sets out for the continent ; for he is to go with us. My Lady would not consent to quit England on any other conditions ; for Mr. Somerton is a great favourite.”

“ So I fear !” sighed Miss Ashgrove, leaning on my arm ; for she had not strength to support herself on receiving this intelligence.

“ I will thank you to send a servant for a chaise,” said I. “ We will set out for Bristol immediately.”

“ It is only a pleasant walk of a mile to the next inn,” replied the woman : “ but some kinds of people are fond of giving trouble.”

“ My friend is too ill to proceed on foot,” said I : “ I will therefore thank you to do as I desire you.”

“Aye, thanks are the only rewards we get from folks of your description,” replied the *femme de chambre*. “But, in order that you may be off before my Lady returns, I will nevertheless oblige you; for my Lady said that she hoped you would be gone.”

“You slander Lady Arcot,” said I: “she cannot be so changed since last I saw her: there must be some mysterious cause for this inhospitable treatment; and were not the health and repose of my dear friend at stake, I would insist on seeing your Lady, to demand an explanation.” The Abigail smiled; and shutting the door with a concussion which shook the house to its centre, quitted the chamber.

Mary proposed descending to the breakfast-room; but I entreated her not to hazard a second view of the unworthy Somerton. I dreaded the consequences
of

of a meeting at the moment when she stood on the very margin of her grave ; and I looked with impatience for the arrival of her father, feeling the necessity of her having a protector now more than ever.

On inquiry I found that Mrs. Ferret had set out for London early in the morning ; that poor Jenkins had made his escape during the confusion which succeeded Mary's sudden alarm ; and that my watch and jewels were left in the possession of Lord Arcot, to be restored to me previous to my departure.

My mind was intently occupied, while we were waiting for the chaise, in ruminations on the conduct of Lady Arcot. All the ingenuity of suggestion could not afford any probable cause for such rude and unexampled behaviour. I had known the charming, the lovely Lady Upas, as one of the most inestimable

of women : she had protected me against an host of enemies ; sustained my sinking fortitude, when calumny assailed me ; patronized, and afforded me an asylum, even in defiance of the world's opinion ; and promised never to withdraw her friendship, while I proved worthy of possessing it. Added to these reflections, memory presented a new source of astonishment. Lady Upas had ever been correct in her domestic conduct. She had uniformly reprobated the libertine manners of her fashionable female associates ; and professed an invincible abhorrence of those household reptiles, who enjoy the favours of a wife at the expence of an husband's honour. Yet, by the ambiguous tone and confident smiles of her *femme de chambre*, the profligate, the licentious Somerton was at once *l'ami de la maison*, and the abuser of its hospitality.

We

We waited a considerable time, but finding no chaise arrive, I requested Mary to remain in her room, while I descended to make inquiries respecting its delay. I had scarcely reached the hall when I met Lord Arcot's *valet de chambre*, who with a civil demeanour desired me to visit the library where his Lord waited to restore my watch and jewels. Reluctantly I obeyed; and on entering the room my eyes instantly met those of the nabob. He was seated on a superb chintz sofa, richly ornamented with green and gold fringe: the canopy, over which two Cupids suspended wreathes of artificial roses, crowned an extensive pannel of looking glass, forming the entire back of this luxurious resting-place. His dress was a morning gown of the finest embroidered white muslin, lined with pale lilac, and trimmed with Bruffels' lace: on an ivory-table, inlaid with gold, stood his hooka: at his feet, a vase, filled with

with aromatic gums, sent forth the most fragrant perfume, as the smoke rose in columns to the ceiling.

The Oriental magnificence which marked every thing around me, only served to contrast the prominent object, and to render him more than disgusting. The saffron-tinted complexion and uncouth form, acquired no graces from the tasteful back-ground which the scene presented; but as deformed persons generally adopt those ornaments which render their defects more strikingly conspicuous, so did Lord Arcot decorate his unwieldy figure with the most delicately-chosen habiliments; while he, like the destructive poppy, displayed his gaudy trappings, a loathsome weed amidst the profusion of nature.

Perceiving the mute astonishment which filled my mind, the ennobled nabob grew doubly consequential: he made me a signal to sit down, by waving

ing

ing his hand, and then pointing to a chair; while his head, thrown back upon his shoulders, presented his chin in nearly an horizontal position. Scarcely able to refrain from laughing, I took my seat, while his Lordship, puffing his odoriferous hooka almost between every word he uttered, thus addressed me:

“ I am prodigiously delighted in having the power to convince you of my good intentions, notwithstanding the impropriety and ingratitude of your conduct. The good woman whom you so indiscreetly accused of having robbed you, being a particular friend of my Lady Arcot's, is acquitted of every criminal charge. The evidence was too feeble to admit of proceedings, legal; and the confidence which is placed in her by persons of the highest rank, is an incontrovertible proof that she cannot be guilty. With regard to the poor vagabond, Jenkins, he ought to suffer for his
rascality;

rascality ; because nobody cares what becomes of such beggarly riff-raff. But as you said that the jewels were in Mrs. Ferret's possession, and as we found them in the pockets of the delinquent, there remained not a doubt but they must have been removed by some unknown means : till the fact, and the method of committing it, be clearly ascertained, Jenkins cannot be charged with feloniously stealing them."

" I am convinced that the articles your Lordship mentions were conveyed into Jenkins's pocket during our journey," said I ; " for Mrs. Ferret sat next to him, and had the most convenient opportunity thereby of shaking off the shame due to her crime, by casting the odium upon an innocent person : for, that she deserves punishment, is equally certain, as it is shameful that she has been permitted to escape it."

" That

“ That is not your business,” interrupted Lord Arcot ; “ therefore I shall not demean myself by condescending to discuss it. It was my Lady’s desire that Mrs. Ferret should be permitted to depart : and as for the poor scoundrel, he did not wait for his dismissal ; for fellows of his low lineage are often apt to think for themselves ; which, in my opinion, is prodigiously insolent.”

I smiled, I believe contemptuously. Lord Arcot continued :

“ Therefore, as you will again possess the jewels, and as nobody dares own having the papers, I think the wisest thing you can do, is to make up your mind to the matter. Law is a dangerous weapon when it is in the hands of the vulgar. Mrs. Ferret is a most respectable and valuable member of society ; she would therefore certainly escape. The poor rogue would probably swing ; because nobody would vouch for his character.”

“ Heaven

“Heaven shield the children of poverty from such discriminations,” said I.

“Why, the fact is, that property is the bulwark of reputation,” cried Lord Arcot; “and ugly actions will wear new features, when they are masked in gold: while your petty, pilfering, vagabondising ragamuffins, display their bare-faced crimes in all their native deformity.” I sighed, and shook my head, but made no comment.

Lord Arcot now opened a small amber cabinet which stood near the sofa, and taking a sealed parcel from one of the drawers, presented it to me. “There are your jewels,” said he; “and I trust that you will find them safe.” I bowed and thanked him. He now approached me, and modulating his tone of voice to a whining plaintiveness, he added; “Ah, Gertrude! Idol of my soul! Would to Heaven that all the treasures of the Eastern world could purchase such a jewel as yourself!”

I started.

I started from my seat, and would have quitted the room; but the effort was ineffectual: his Lordship threw his arms about me, and detained me. I shrieked, and in a few moments Lady Arcot rushed into the apartment.

Frances, how shall I describe the feelings of my heart, when, in the wife of my persecutor, I beheld the detested Emma Cecil! My consternation was unutterable; and I should have sunk to the earth with confusion, had not the sound of her voice again roused me to exert my fortitude.

"This is prodigiously unlucky," said the Nabob.

"My Lord, I command you to be gone!" cried Lady Arcot, with a look at once imperious and scornful. Then, turning towards me, she added; "You, Madam, I will detain till I have Lord Denmore's orders how I shall dispose of you." She now rang the bell; and
on

on the servant's entering the room, she laid fast hold on my arm—" Assist me in confining this maniac," said her Ladyship, till such time as she can be conveyed to a place of security." The servant obeyed, and I was hurried into an adjoining room, from whence I was conveyed up a narrow staircase, to a chamber on the attic story.

The door was locked on the outside ; and I was left to meditate on the singularity of the outrage which I had experienced. My distress was infinite ; but as soon as I recovered from the surprise which attended this adventure, I began to exert all my strength to force the door of the apartment. Vain was the effort. The barrier was formed for security, by being plated with iron, and fastened with a secret spring, both strong and complex. I therefore threw myself into a chair, and resigned myself to my situation.

My

My thoughts now dwelt on the distress which Miss Ashgrove would suffer, supposing that I had deserted her at a moment so interesting. I could not refrain from tears when I recollected her situation, in sickness and despair, under the roof with the abandoned Somerton, and the no less infamous Lady Arcot. Two hours passed in the most profound reverie, when I heard light footsteps ascending the stairs towards my prison. My heart palpitated with reviving hope; and I approached the door to listen, when a voice whispered; "Take courage, and you shall soon be set at liberty." I thanked the unknown visitor, and requested that he would bring me a pencil and some writing paper, which might be conveyed under the door of the apartment. He promised to obey, and in a few moments I was prepared with the means of writing this letter; which, having thrown myself on my bed during the
hours

hours of darkness, I conclude early in the morning. I trust, that by some fortunate means I may be enabled to dispatch it, in case my tyrant should determine to execute her menace: but believe, that whatever my destiny may be, I shall remain yours affectionately.

LETTER LXXXIV.

The Same to the Same.

August 11, 1797.

THE whole day has passed, and it is now near sun-set; yet I have experienced no change in my situation. I feel little anxiety respecting my own fate, but my heart is painfully agitated for the safety of Miss Ashgrove. I find, by a large iron recess in the corner of my room, that the strong double door was designed

as

as a security for the plate chest ; and that the housekeeper's chamber is also adjoining. I have received two visits from my unknown friend, and he has assured me, that he will make every effort to procure my emancipation. I have also another hope of resource in the sympathy of a female servant, who has promised to convey my letters to the post during my confinement. She also informs me, that Miss Ashgrove has not quitted her bed since yesterday morning ; that she refuses every kind of nourishment ; and that she awaits the arrival of her father, to whom she has written, with the utmost impatience.

The evening is serene ; the sun sets in a clear and glowing horizon ; the woods, above which my window rises, are tinged with the crimson reflection of the sky, and the prospect on every side is luxuriously varied. How magically soothing are the beauties of nature ! how irresistibly

irresistibly do they soften and refine the heart, even at the moment when it is sickening with sorrow !

Day closes rapidly ; the grey shadows of twilight steal over the landscape, and my chamber every moment becomes more darkened. I fear that I am destined to pass another night in this tedious solitude. At all events I will not close my letter till to-morrow.

August 12.

I RESUME my pen ; but ah, Frances ! with an agitation of soul that is not to be described. Mary, the gentle friend, the companion of my misfortunes, was this morning removed by order of Lady Arcot to the cottage near the park ; where she is now lodged, without the faintest hope of recovery. She knows how I am situated ; but she is in too feeble a state to travel ; and she counts the moments with agonizing solicitude, till her father shall arrive to rescue me.

From

From my lofty window I can distinguish the chamber where this amiable girl is, I fear, destined to perish. What phantoms of despair assail me on every side! what horrors do they excite! what agonies inflict on my withering and almost broken heart!

Not an hour since, I saw Lord and Lady Melcomb cross the park in an open carriage. I have also discovered that an express has been dispatched to desire Lord Denmore's immediate attendance. What trials have I to encounter! Heaven grant me patience!

I am interrupted by the sound of footsteps near my chamber. I listen—

A folded paper is conveyed under the door.—I am impatient to examine it.—

Frances! my joy is undescribable! The kind, the generous friend, who has sympathized in my sorrows, informs me that he has by stratagem obtained the

key of my apartment, and at midnight will effect my emancipation.—Blessings, blessings on the benignant spirit which actuates his conduct, and awakens my desponding soul to renovated hopes of freedom.

Mary is still living. In a few hours I shall be enabled to judge more decidedly on her situation. I doubt, I fear, I tremble, while I look forward with the most torturing anxiety. I am now within thirty miles of Denmore Castle. If she is able to endure the journey, we will instantly hasten thither. Lord Denmore cannot, he will not spurn from his door so amiable, so gentle a wanderer. If he should persevere in his unkind resentment, I have still every thing to hope from the philanthropy of the good curate. The dear romantic parsonage shall be our calm asylum; I shall there once more behold—

—I shudder!—

—The

—The monument of the Denmore family !

Why does the blood recoil from my heart at the idea ? Frances, remember my prediction : there, *there* I shall find repose !

How anxiously do I wait for the period of my departure ; how tardily does time move when sorrow lingers through the hours of expectation. Yet why do I look forward with eagerness ? why pant for the moment which will release me from one calamity, only to expose my aching bosom to new trials of vicissitude ? I shall perhaps quit this lonely apartment, and escape from the insolent outrage which Lady Arcot has dared put in practice ; but shall I not behold a dear friend on the bed of death, if not already released from the pangs of sensibility ? Shall I not be, once more, a solitary traveller on a wide world of misery, exposed to a repetition of those sorrows

which have already nearly exhausted my fortitude? Shall I not, in a short period, behold Lord Denmore married? The blood seems to freeze about my heart.

I write near my window. I will endeavour to rouse my soul from this petrifying despondency. Beautiful nature! I will divert my afflictions from their mournful tenour, by contemplating thy wonders.—Oh, supreme and omniscient God! how grand, how vast, how sublime are thy works; how infinite thy power; how undefinable thy dispensations!

A light shower is falling on the yellow leaves; the air is temperately refreshing; the rain-drops penetrate the wide branches which overshadow the turf beneath, excepting where the evening sun throws the long column of vivid lustre among the scattered trees. How richly variegated is the prospect; how enchantingly serene the hour! and yet, how
3 strangely

strangely are my spirits depressed; how deeply is the laboured sigh drawn from my sad heart!

Frances! it is in vain that I endeavour to combat with my destiny. I am one of those ill-starred mortals who, for some inexplicable cause, are created to be wretched; and it is useless for that being, on whom the seal of fate is fixed, to oppose its strong, its invincible magic. From the hour that I beheld Lord Denmore, on my arrival at the castle, I felt the sure and indelible presentiment, that my journey through this bewildering maze of vicissitudes would be short, but painful. You have been no stranger to its progress hitherto; and you will shortly behold its awful termination. The summer scene already begins to fade; the beauties of Nature, scorched by the mellowing sky, seem to droop in sickening languor. The brown woods that nod on the steep mountain's side, the noon-

parched meadows, and the wild yellow heath, now mark the decaying season : yet a little while shall the rich foliage wave to the rising sun, the wild heath shed its fragrance, the meadows flaunt their flowerets and their dews, before the winds shall howl, the swift eddying leaf be blown, or the autumnal torrent fall on my grave !

The sky is darkened with thick gathering clouds, which seem to overshadow the altered face of Nature ; yet to me her features are no less lovely : the sober hue of melancholy, which gives repose to the still landscape, is soothing to my senses. Why, why do mistaken mortals seek the phantom Pleasure in scenes of folly and deception ?

I have paused to contemplate the bursting storm. The sky is dark ; the distant mountains are blackened, as the heavy clouds roll over them. The venerable trees wave as the wind disturbs

turbs their branches ; and the rain falls in torrents over the extended scenery. How congenial to my feelings is the impressive change. I could indulge my soul in its meditative mood, till frenzy put a period to reflection.

Ah, Frances ! my timid fancy now wanders over the stormy ocean with the gallant Edward. He perhaps, with all his virtues, all his sensibility, is beat about by the unruly storm, dashed upon some rocky shore, or dead, ingulphed in the fathomless abyss, and sinking to unknown worlds.

The tempest increases every moment. The thunder rolls terrifically along the sky ; and the frequent lightning flashes on my paper.

To-morrow I will conclude my letter.

August 13.

I WAITED with impatience till near midnight ; when, according to the
D 4 stranger's

stranger's promise, I heard him approaching my apartment. The door was instantly opened; and in total darkness we began to descend the stairs, while he held my hand, and I scarcely breathed as he led me. Not one syllable was uttered; and in a few minutes we reached the park. The sky was imperviously dark; not a single star was visible; the rain had ceased to fall; but the wind still blew loud and violent.

I frequently thanked my guide, though I could scarcely see him: he pressed my arm as if to keep me silent. Thus, without interruption we crossed the park, and entered the high road. I now informed the stranger that I wished to visit the cottage where poor Mary was lodged by order of Lady Arcot; and you will judge of my consternation, when my companion informed me, that she had, that very night, set out for Bristol.

This

This intelligence almost annihilated every hope : my guide spoke in a low whisper, conjuring me to rely upon his zeal and discretion ; and a silence of several minutes again followed. Still we continued to walk hastily : the roads were deep, and the sky as dark as my destiny. As I held the arm of my companion, I felt it tremble. His trepidation, added to his silence, at length alarmed me ; and I briefly exclaimed, “ For Heaven’s sake, whither are you leading me ? ”

“ To happiness, my sweet Gertrude ! ” replied the infamous Treville. I shrieked, and was near fainting. Still he compelled me to proceed, though my limbs nearly lost the power of motion. I looked around me, terrified, and almost frantic ; but no light was to be seen : not a cottage, not an habitation of any kind met my eyes. On one side the road opened to an extensive heath, on

the other it was bounded by a thick wood. By this time the sky had began to clear, and the stars afforded me light sufficient to observe the horrors of my situation.

On a sudden my steps were arrested; and I heard a voice inquiring whether "all had succeeded?" Mr. Treville answered, "Yes." I then perceived a curricle waiting by the wood-side, out of which jumped the trusty Scamper.

"Well, Sir, I congratulate you on your enterprize," said he. "You know the cross-road to the manor-house; and, if she again escapes, you do not deserve to possess her."

"Leave that to me," replied Mr. Treville; "and do you take care of your charge till we are beyond the possibility of pursuit. Inform Lady Arcot, that unexpected business of importance obliged me to proceed from Cheltenham to London; and when you have
quieted

quieted the suspicions of the family, follow me as speedily as possible." My terror was only to be equalled by the atrocity of the stratagem by which I had been entrapped. I beheld myself in the power of two villains, whose minds were capable of any machination; and whose desperate conduct, on former occasions, left little cause for hope at the present juncture. Mr. Treville and Scamper conversed low; and I heard the former say, "She shall be removed to-morrow night, and I desire that you will be at the manor-house by eleven o'clock. There is only the old woman to receive us, and I can easily silence her."

"Heavens!" exclaimed I, "whither do you mean to convey me?"

"To a splendid abode," replied Mr. Treville; "which I trust you will in future consider as your home."

"Never," said I.

“ It will be left to your choice, whether you become my wife by inclination, or my mistress by compulsion,” answered he; “ for either one or the other you must be shortly.”

“ You cannot mean what you say; you value life, if you are careless of reputation; and you must be aware of the consequences that will attend this outrage,” said I.

“ We will talk of that hereafter,” replied Mr. Treville, stepping into the curricie; at the same moment his confederate, seizing me in his arms, endeavoured to seat me beside him. I shrieked vehemently, while the horses set off at full speed. Scamper, fearful that the carriage would be overturned, the road being deep and rugged, ran after us: my voice still added to the peril, by frightening the horses, and we continued gallopping with dangerous velocity.

Mr.

Mr. Treville seemed careless as to the consequences of this terrifying expedition. He neither spoke, nor endeavoured to stop our career; but urging on the horses, already masters of the reins, convinced me that our destruction was almost inevitable. The only hope that sustained me at this moment, was that of our continuing on the public high-way. I dreaded the idea of crossing the country by a private road; particularly as I found, from what I could collect in Mr. Treville's conversation with Scamper, that we were journeying towards a lonely manor-house, where I should be exposed to every outrage that could intimidate or insult me.

Thus we proceeded near two miles; when, by suddenly turning an angle in the road, the curricie overset, and we were both thrown to a considerable distance. I was little hurt by the fall; and my alarm was considerably lessened by
the

the recollection, that any delay was preferable to the terrors of my former situation.

We had been in this dilemma only a few minutes, when Scamper overtook us. The vexation which was evident, both in the mind of Mr. Treville and his confederate, is not to be described. They uttered the most horrid imprecations, as they suggested various plans, all equally villainous and alarming; while I meditated the means of making my escape by stratagem, conscious that I had no hope, either in speed or strength, to evade their purpose.

The evening had considerably brightened, and the moon had risen: by its light I beheld the situation in which we had met with our accident; not a house was near, the road was lonesome, and the infamous betrayer of my confidence wore a belt round his waist, in which he had a brace of pistols. The curricl was
considerably

considerably shattered by overturning, and the harness so deranged, that it was impossible to proceed on our expedition. A consultation was held; and Scamper proposed continuing our route on foot: "It is not more than four miles to the manor-house," said he; "and we can take the short path across the meadows."

I was now terrified more than even when the horses pursued their way with the most dangerous velocity. The only hope that remained when the carriage overset, was that of some travellers passing, by whose assistance I might be rescued from my persecutors. How to protract the time, in order to favour the chance of such interference, I knew not; and I was absorbed in rumination on the subject, when Mr. Treville again startled me, by addressing the minion of his infamy:

"Do

“ Do you stay with the curricie,” said he, “ till some opportunity presents itself whereby you may obtain assistance ; and I will take care of Gertrude.” Then turning towards me, he added ; “ we will proceed to the manor-house ; fear nothing, you may rely on my affection.”

“ I will not quit this spot,” said I : “ your affection I disdain to accept ; and your conduct I execrate with firmness, invincible.”

“ You are perfectly safe,” said he.

“ I know I am,” answered I ; “ for cruelty and cowardice are invariably associates. You dare not carry insult farther ; because you are aware that it will not pass unpunished.”

“ From whom do you hope for protection ?” said he ; with a tone of voice tauntingly provoking. “ Do you imagine that Lord Denmore will, on the point of marriage, either hazard his felicity

city or his life, in the cause of a romantic girl? Believe me he has too much sense to barter substantial bliss for the mere shadow of chivalry."

"I expect nothing from Lord Denmore," said I: "he has too long and too unfeelingly neglected me; but thank Heaven there are beings who are not dead to the sensibilities of nature."

"I crave your pardon, Miss St. Leger," interrupted Mr. Treville; "I had totally forgot your new innamorato. Mr. Ashgrove is really so insignificant a being, that he did not strike my memory."

"He is an angel!" said I.—Mr. Treville smiled.

"We will discuss this matter in a more convenient place," answered he, taking my hand and endeavouring to lead me. I shrieked involuntarily; still he persevered in compelling me to attend him; I resisted with all my strength; but
my

my efforts were ineffectual when compared with the violence of his, and I was led several paces without the possibility of breaking from him.

We had not proceeded far, when, to my infinite joy, I heard the rattling of a carriage; and in a few moments distinguished a post-chaise, with four horses, advancing with the utmost speed toward us. Mr. Treville's perturbation was evident; the hand with which he held me trembled; the other grasped one of his pistols. The carriage approached. I struggled to escape; my strength seemed renovated by the hope which now presented itself; and with an effort almost incredible, I tore myself from him.

“Scamper now seized me by one arm; while Mr. Treville caught the other. The travellers, perceiving my situation, stopped their postillion: one of them presented his pistol; Mr. Treville let go his hold, and would have made

made his escape ; the stranger fired ; the ball missed him, but the aim was not wholly ineffectual ; for in a moment I beheld Scamper fall, as he exclaimed, " Mercy ! have mercy ; for I am wounded ! "

The travellers now quitted their carriage ; my terror was excessive ; one of them supported me ; it was Mary's father, who was hastening to pay the last tribute of paternal feeling to a beloved and amiable daughter : the other had flown in pursuit of Mr. Treville. Mr. Ashgrove immediately, with the postilion's aid, placed the wounded Scamper in the chaise. I conjured him not to leave me : his prisoner was in too much pain to resist, or to make his escape ; the carriage was therefore ordered to follow us, and we set forward on foot towards the cottage in which Mary was lodged by Lady Arcot ; where I write this letter, and from whence you shall hear from
me

me again in a day or two. I will only inform you now, that Mary is still living; and assure you, that I am your affectionate friend.

LETTER LXXXV.

The Same to the Same.

August 16, 1797.

IN less than a quarter of an hour we arrived at Arcot-park: with a beating heart I approached the cottage; which, by the light of the moon, was visible at some distance. Mr. Ashgrove's solicitude was evident, by his frequent and earnest inquiries respecting the state of Mary's health. I knew not how to answer him: it would have been barbarous had I soothed his mind with delusive hopes;

hopes; and alas, Frances! I could not teach myself to inflict one of the most severe of mortal pangs, on the bosom of such a father. Ah! my friend; I never knew what it was to receive the embrace of parental affection: I never felt the gentle pressure of an indulgent father's arms; or reposed my head upon the throbbing bosom of a fond, anxious mother. Why, why have I been deprived of those blessings? why am I still hourly agonized with the pang of disappointment, that I never was permitted to enjoy them? The next question which I ask myself is obvious: Why does so neglected, so forlorn, so solitary a being, continue to exist? I shudder while I interrogate my soul: I tremble, while I tacitly reply to such a question: but whither am I wandering?

As we approached the cottage, I observed light in the lower apartment only: conjecture instantly led me to anticipate
the

the very worst that could happen in the long catalogue of human sorrows. I requested that Mr. Ashgrove would permit me to announce his presence ; at the same time informing him, that I dreaded the effect which a sudden surprise might produce on Mary's feelings. He conjured me to be brief in my disclosure of his arrival, because his anxiety rendered him impatient almost to rashness. I promised to obey his commands, and entered the cottage.

I found Miss Ashgrove in her travelling dress, and preparing for her departure. At the sight of me she was nearly overcome with joy : she embraced me ; and, after many ineffectual efforts, at length informed me, that having heard of my quitting Arcot-Hall for Bristol, she had risen from her bed ; and even at the hazard of her life had determined to follow me. The feeble tone of her voice impressed me sensibly ; while her death-like

features too evidently betrayed the rapid approach of that hour, which was destined to sever us eternally. Mr. Ashgrove, who had through the casement witnessed our meeting, now rushed into the room; and clasping his child to his bosom, wept as he embraced her.

A few moments only elapsed before the postillion led Mr. Scamper into the apartment. He was covered with blood; and so agonized by the wound which he had received, that he had scarcely the power to implore our assistance. Mary, who was a stranger to the cause of his alarming appearance, entreated that he would hasten to her chamber, where he should immediately receive every aid which his situation required; while I, with eager solicitude, watched at the window for the arrival of Mr. Treville.

In a few minutes he entered the cottage, followed by several peasants who had been collected together on the road,
and

and led by the collar by the intrepid Edward, who held a pistol to his head. The instant that Mary's eyes met the group, she faintly shrieked, and exclaiming, "Oh God! my brother! Somerton!" fell into her father's arms, entirely senseless.

Frances, she never spoke again! Her journey of earthly suffering terminated at that fatal moment. The life-blood quivered in her convulsive lips; her eyes once opened, but the languor of death almost instantaneously re-closed them; and a sigh, scarcely audible, was her last adieu to this world and its sorrows.

The scene which followed is scarcely describable: even the inhuman, the abandoned Somerton, seemed to shudder; while Mr. Ashgrove knelt by his lifeless daughter, and the astonished Edward stood mutely contemplating the group before him.

Frances!

Frances! picture to your own imagination the vast variety of anguish which possessed every bosom at this awful, this distracting moment: the father bending over the beautiful remains of his age's darling; his white hair falling on his face, which was bathed with tears and convulsed with the excess of sorrow: Edward, with his hands clasped, and his manly features fixed in a petrifying horror, gazing with the silence of unutterable distress; while Somerton, conscious of crimes, which even the plea of human frailty could not palliate, stood pale and self-accused near the victim of his falsehood. Oh, Frances! language must prove too feeble for the expression of such a picture: your feeling heart will throb, while my pen fails to describe it.

With the assistance of a female servant, Edward conveyed the lifeless body to an adjoining chamber: the post-boy was dispatched for medical assistance, Mr.

Ashgrove still fancying that there remained a feeble pulsation; and the vile associate of a no less infamous employer, was conducted to bed, where his wounds were bound so as to stop the effusion of blood; and where, for the present, I shall leave him.

In a few minutes, Edward, who had obtained eight days leave of absence from his ship, recollected the origin of his visit to the cottage: but the artful Somerton had availed himself of the horror which possessed every bosom, and made his escape while we were conveying the remains of poor Mary to the chamber. Edward, snatching up his pistol, was rushing towards the cottage-door, when he suddenly stopped, and after a pause of a few moments, exclaimed—"Heavens! I now recollect the villain's face; he is the person from whose insults I rescued Mary in the New Forest."

"You are right," said I; "he was the object dearest to Mary's heart; for, such was her misfortune, that while she execrated the folly of his conduct, she still felt for him the tenderest affection."

"Then let him go," said Edward, throwing his pistol from him; "if he was dear to her, Heaven forbid that I should be his destroyer:" so saying, he again entered the apartment where Mary had been left with her venerable and almost frantic father, while I questioned the female servant respecting Mr. Treville. She informed me that he had some months before changed his name to Somerton, at the request of a deceased uncle, who had left him a considerable fortune, with an old manor-house not five miles distant from the cottage. The conversation which had passed previous to our entering the curricie, and after it had overfet, corroborated this information, and at once elucidated the mystery

of Mary's inquietude, whenever Mr. Treville's name had been mentioned during the recital of my story. Her motive for secrecy, or rather her want of confidence in my friendship, could originate in one circumstance only : she knew that I execrated the character of Mr. Treville ; and her self-love would have been humbled by an avowal, that all the affections of her heart were devoted to such a monster ; for there is no sensation more painful to the feeling mind, than the consciousness of idolizing a being, whose depravity should render him an object of detestation.

You will perceive, by Edward's conduct, that he is yet unacquainted with the extent of Mr. Somerton's depravity. He considers him as Mary's lover ; but he does not even suspect that his unprincipled caprice has been the cause of her gradual dissolution. This is not the moment to disclose a source of new and

torturing affliction: and I fear that my anxiety for Edward's safety will never suffer me, on this interesting subject, to undeceive him.

In less than twenty minutes a surgeon arrived at the cottage. A vein was opened in Mary's temple, but every symptom of animation had entirely vanished. Her pulses were silent; her heart was still; her lip was frozen in death; and her eyes closed for ever! Oh, Frances! had you seen how placidly her countenance was fixed: how lovely, how tranquilly she seemed to smile at the blissful emancipation of her soul from earthly bondage, you would have envied that annihilation which alone can give repose to minds, cursed with sensibility! Happy! most happy is that mortal, whose torpid breast can bid defiance to the tumultuous passions; who travels through the labyrinths of life heedless of the thorns which lurk beneath his fairest flowers,

flowers, and, satisfied with the enjoyment of his dull vapid hour, forgets the past, and is heedless of the future.

Farewell, my dearest Frances, I am convinced that your bosom is replete with sensibility, and I feel some degree of consolation in knowing also that I share its sympathy.

LETTER LXXXVI.

The Same to the Same.

August 19, 1797.

So rapidly do my perplexities augment, that one source of sorrow is merely the prelude to another; and I can scarcely summon resolution to combat the effects of a past calamity, before a new trial pallies the effort, and subdues me.

How

How delusive have been my hopes, how ineffectual all my labours to resist the misery which destroys me. Frequent and agonizing have been my trials; long and gloomy is the path through which I am destined to wander. Oh, Denmore! To your past affection I owe every misfortune!—To the early, the deceptive dawn of happiness which you presented, my faculties expanded, my reason awoke, and my sensibility yielded, without a resisting thought. Taught to consider you as the most perfect of created beings, I entertained no fear that evil could proceed from the source of such benevolence; I loved you, before I questioned my heart upon the subject, and I became a bigot, because I never doubted the perfection of my idol. Mistaken woman!

Oh, Frances! where is my resource, and what are my prospects? I shall be either destined to linger through a life of
E 4 unavailing

unavailing regret, or I shall quit this sublunary, this probationary scene, stigmatized, and unlamented. Forgive the expression: I know, my friend, that sorrow will be the associate of your bosom, when mine will be for ever tranquil.

This morning early, I received an abrupt and unexpected visit from Lady Arcot. She entered the room where I was sitting, with the corpse of my sweet friend, and without ceremony, commenced a conversation, which soon announced the motive of her visit.

Finding that she came not to console me, I rose, and quitting the chamber, descended to the parlour; she followed. "Here, Lady Arcot, I am capable of listening," said I; "but I request that you will be explicit, for I am little disposed to waste the hour which is due to sorrow, in useless altercation."

"Then,

"Then, I can defer my business till some future period," said Lady Arcot, haughtily; "for I shall not give myself the trouble to speak where there is so little chance of receiving attention. Lord Denmore——"

"What of Lord Denmore," interrupted I.

"I will tell you all I know, when you have passed the hour which is due to-morrow," replied Lady Arcot, with a malignant sneer.

"Do not mock my affliction," said I; "but tell me all you know respecting Lord Denmore." Lady Arcot smiled.

"You seem agitated," cried she; "you must have a most capacious heart, that can at the same period throb for such a variety of objects."

"This is insult—I thought you came to speak on matters of importance," said I.

"Where is Mr. Somerton?" interrupted Lady Arcot.

"Perish the villain! I know not where he is," said I.

"How well you can dissemble," cried Lady Arcot.

"I cannot answer such suspicions," said I; "my heart is nearly broken by sorrow, and my fortitude subdued by perpetual persecution. If you came hither only to torment me, I must decline the painful task of listening to your reproaches."

"Conscious of deserving them;" interrupted Lady Arcot. "But know, vile and unfeeling girl, Lord Denmore is apprized of your elopement, and unites with me in abhorrence of your conduct."

"My elopement! Lord Denmore's abhorrence of my conduct!" repeated I, almost overwhelmed at the idea; "who has been so barbarous as to calumniate me?"

me? who has dared assert so infamous a falsehood?"

"The friend of Lord Denmore," replied Lady Arcot, "one who would not suffer his noble philanthropic nature to be again imposed on by an artful hypocrite. If he has either pride or sensibility, he will detest and shun a being, whose life has presented a continued series of ingratitude and falsehood. If he has courage, or a consciousness of what he owes to his rank and reputation, he will not let your paramour escape unpunished." As she spoke, Edward entered the room; seeing my evident distress, he inquired the cause, for he was a stranger to the person of Lady Arcot; while she, persevering in the rancour of her resentment, continued to address me.

"Your profligate connection with the lover of your friend can no longer be kept secret; your conduct has broke

her heart, and exposed Mr. Somerton to the resentment of her family. For nothing but the most abject tameness can suffer such a being to triumph with impunity. Indeed, Lord Arcot would have pursued the villain, had he not heard that Miss Ashgrove left a brother, as brave as he was affectionate."

"Oh! Lady Arcot, what are your motives," said I, bursting into tears.

"To expose your duplicity, and to undeceive Mr. Ashgrove," said Lady Arcot. "I am no stranger to your designs on him. But he is too generous, and too brave to be the dupe of Mr. Somerton's machinations, or to form an alliance with the mistress of an acknowledged libertine."

"I cannot reply to such injurious charges," said I, venturing at the same time to glance at Edward, whose countenance betrayed the conflicts of his mind.—Lady Arcot also observed his
emotion,

emotion, and softening her voice, addressed him :

“ I do not wonder at your feeling most acutely the affront which has been offered to the honour of your family, and the consequent loss of so amiable a sister,” said she ; “ the most forbearing spirit would revolt at such an injury ; and though I lament the necessity of your chastising such a being, I trust that the example will be useful to society.”

I now perceived that Lady Arcot's assumed sense of propriety originated in resentment, jealousy, and offended pride. She had lost her favourite Somerton, and she hoped, that by inducing Edward to feel for the sufferings of his sister, she should behold her deserter either punished, or annihilated.

As ardent and active minds are most liable to sudden impressions, I trembled while I anticipated the effects of Lady Arcot's

Arcot's cunning. I observed the countenance of my accuser, while it seemed to influence that of Edward with a kind of mental magnetism. His arms were folded, his eyes bent upon the ground, his brows contracted, and his cheek pale with the smothered conflicts of anger and affliction. I knew not what to say, or how to silence the malignant tongue of a woman, who had been tutored in the school of malice and hypocrisy. The mind of Emma Cecil had long been contaminated by the malevolence of her nature; and the union with such a being as Sir Hector Upas, could not fail to confirm her pre-eminence in all that was vicious and unfeeling.

After a silence of several minutes Edward, as if roused from a dream, darted towards the door, and quitted the room. I would have followed him, but Lady Arcot seizing my arm detained me,

me, with, "Hear what I have to say respecting Lord Denmore."

Perplexed, distracted, I tore myself from her, and flew to seek the rash and credulous Edward; but he had quitted the house; and, before I could search every chamber, was too far distant for me to overtake him. I now returned to the parlour, but Lady Arcot had also mounted her horse and departed. My last resource was that of unburthening my full heart to you; and I now close my letter, to pass the remainder of the night in the chamber of poor Mary.

LETTER LXXXVII.

The Same to the Same.

August 21, 1797.

YESTERDAY the remains of my lamented friend were deposited in the village church nearest the spot where she bade the world farewell for ever. She was followed to her grave by her father and myself, with the female servant who had been her attendant since she resided at the cottage. I know not why, but the scene did not so deeply penetrate my heart as it would have done at earlier periods of my life: accustomed to see others suffer, and to feel the severest sorrows of a mournful destiny, I now consider the tomb as the only desirable refuge from pain and persecution. Frances, when I sink into the still sleep
of

of death, I charge you not to lament me. Remember that I knew no hour of repose in this busy, varying scene of mortal suffering, and rejoice that the too afflicted soul is at length freed from its prison of probationary trial.

Edward is still absent. I shall depart from this melancholy spot to-morrow. Scamper's surgeon has pronounced his wound incurable, and a short period will seal his destiny. He has requested to see me, and I have promised in an hour to obey his summons.

Mr. Ashgrove is inconsolable; but *I*, Frances, *I* am almost insensible to the pangs of mental agony. The pressure of perpetual pain has deadened the faculty of feeling, and I now shrink almost to inanity.

How amiable, how deserving of affection, is the brave, the generous Edward! Why, Frances, why do I not feel a sensation more touching to the
heart

heart than mere admiration, when I compare his virtues with the claims of ordinary beings? Why does my fascinated mind still doat on an ungrateful mortal, whose conduct has been hostile to my every hope of happiness; who has enthralled my heart, merely to humble it with the misery of contempt; and who, at a moment when I most languish for the consolations of sympathy, resigns me, hopeless and forlorn, to the tyranny of sorrow; yet, I blush while I confess my weakness, yet, Frances, I am the slave of my unconquerable passion. I journey through a life of solitary anguish, without the courage to seek a path more soothing: one hour I meditate revenge, I feel the indignant spirit of my soul revolt at the insulting neglect which I experience; I determine to annihilate Lord Denmore;—myself. I behold the grave as my last and only asylum. Alas! how changeable, how transient

transient are my resolutions! I seek the unfeeling destroyer of my repose; I behold him, and I am again the dupe of my affections.

Why do I fly from the attention of Edward Ashgrove? Lord Denmore has avowed his attachment to another; he is regardless of my sorrows; he insults my pride, he wounds my sensibility. There are moments when I experience an agitation of mind which menaces my reason. I endeavour to methodize my feelings; I summons the resisting powers of pride and scorn; they do not calm my feverish brain; they agitate its fibres almost to frenzy. I seek the dissipating charm of mixed society; there too I sicken into sadness; I fancy every scene disgusting; I behold every object with a jaundiced eye: Oh, sensibility! thou curse to woman! thou bane of all our hopes, thou source of exultation to our tyrant man! How abject dost thou render

der even the most exalted minds; how decidedly dost thou fasten on the senses; how inevitably dost thou annihilate all that is dignified and noble: how infinitely do thy pangs exceed thy pleasures; how transient are thy triumphs; how destructive are thy sorrows! In what respect does the human heart derive an advantage from sensibility? Are not even its raptures agonizing? Does not the tumult of excessive joy inflict a degree of agitation which amounts to pain? Will not an act of generosity experienced thrill through the brain, excite our tears, convulse the bosom, and convey through every fibre a sense of torturing ecstasy? Oh! Frances! there is no soothing opiate for the mind but apathy: to feel is to be wretched.

I am summoned to the chamber of a guilty mortal, whose soul is labouring with the conflicts of despair and death. How awful, how impressivè are the
sensations

sensations which I feel at this moment ; Frances, even that pity which we cannot deny to the most criminal, is a species of sensibility which, though it bears the stamp of humanity, incontestibly proves how much more human nature is prone to vice than to virtue. We do not sympathize where we feel no similitude of sentiment ; the parent eagerly participates in the throbbings of parental anguish ; and the lover involuntarily pities the misery of love. These reflections sink deep into my heart, for I despair of consolation from congenial sorrow, believing, that in the vast universe, there exists not a being so supremely wretched!

LETTER LXXXVIII.

The Same to the Same.

August 22, 1797.

AT the moment when I had sealed my last letter, Lord Arcot abruptly entered the room. The dejection of my spirits was ill suited to the unwelcome intrusion of such a visitor: and without even inquiring the motive of his rudeness, I rose to quit the apartment. With that effrontery which is one of his most striking characteristics, he placed himself between me and the door, and entreated that I would not leave him: "I have prodigious great news to tell you," said he; "news that will make your beautiful eyes sparkle like brilliants through their tears—"

"This

“This is not a time for my heart to bear an augmentation of sorrow,” interrupted I: “if you have unpleasing intelligence to communicate, my Lord, I will thank you to defer it till another opportunity.”

“Nothing like the time present,” replied Lord Arcot; “besides, as you are so flighty in your notions, I may not find you here to-morrow, and I should be prodigiously vexed if you heard it from any other person.”

“Be brief then my Lord,” said I.

“Why so confoundedly hasty?” cried Lord Arcot: “Fair and softly is my maxim, and I never knew it otherwise than profitable. You women are always in such a hurry: you never give one time to explain things properly; and if you fluster me with your cross looks and your angry tones, I shall forget half that I have to say, for I have a prodigious bad memory.”

“Therein

“ Therein you are perhaps fortunate, my Lord,” said I.

“ Never more so than when I can oblige the angelic sex,” replied his Lordship.

“ Spare yourself the pains of complimenting my sex at the expence of my patience,” said I; “ and tell me why you have so abruptly broke in upon me? I have not leisure to listen, neither have I inclination to bear a repetition of insult.”

• “ Not for the treasures of the eastern world would I be the cause of afflicting so beautiful a creature !” exclaimed Lord Arcot.

“ Then be explicit,” said I.

“ All in good time,” replied his Lordship: “ but first you must tell me what made you take me for a justice ? why I was only joking all the while : it was a contrivance of Somerton’s ; he got intelligence from the trusty varlet, Scamper, who

who bribed the waiter to employ poor Jenkins the exciseman as a constable, and by that means to bring you to Arcot-hall."

"Heavens! have I been deceived again?" said I.

"Only a frolic; a whim of Somerton's," said Lord Arcot: "the adventurous rogue has lately had a fortune left to him; and his old manor-house wanted a mistress. But he was confoundedly taken in when he discovered that your companion was Miss Ashgrove; for he confessed to me that he was once prodigiously smitten with her beauty, though he never designed to marry her."

"Profligate wretch!" exclaimed I: "she is beyond the reach of his machinations."

"If women will fret and die, how can we help it?" said Lord Arcot: "but this is not the subject I came to talk on. I have news to tell you about Lord Denmore."

“ Is he married ?” said I, trembling.

“ Not yet,” answered Lord Arcot : “ he first means to smuggle you to Denmore-castle, and from thence to Ireland ; therefore, if you have a mind to escape imprisonment for the rest of your days, place yourself under my protection ; dispose of my fortune, and set his tyranny at defiance.”

“ You counsel well, my Lord,” said I disdainfully ; “ but you will have some difficulty in convincing me, that infamy is less painful than the loss of liberty.”

“ You talk prodigiously foolish,” interrupted Lord Arcot : “ the times give proof, that there is no act of atrocity which the name of Liberty will not sanction. If the low riff-raff have not every thing they want ; if they cannot overturn the established authority of their superiors, they plead the enthusiasm of Liberty. If a wife breaks the fetters of matrimonial restraint, though we all
know

know that women were born to be slaves, why, forsooth, she is only called a lover of Liberty. If mankind are set on to cut one-another's throats, and to desolate whole kingdoms, it is all placed to the account of poor Liberty. For my part, I think there is nothing more ridiculous, excepting chastity : but, thank Heaven ! nobody dreads the augmentation of its votaries ; for we shall never see wars or massacres for the establishment of universal celibacy."

" There is little chance of any species of reformation while the Church and State are in such hands as Mr. Somerton's and your Lordship's," said I : " the poison of vice and folly must be eradicated by the thinking orders of mankind : the valley is more prolific than the mountain."

" Prodigiously democratic !" exclaimed Lord Arcot : " but women are grown so confoundedly knowing, that they be-

gin to think for themselves, and to spurn at the authority of those who ought to be their rulers."

"By what right?" said I: "not by the law of nature; for woman, since she had been allowed the advantages of education, has proved that her intellects are in no degree inferior to those of man; and what she may want in strength of mind, she more than supplies by sentiment, taste, and imagination. Man is an envious, as well as an overbearing creature; he shrinks at the idea of equality, where Time, and that pernicious tyrant Custom, has authorized his power to govern. When women were confined to the dull occupations of domestic duty, men were mere despots; not loved, but feared; blessed, but not blessing. We have broke the destructive spell which manacled the mind; we are no longer the vassals of our imperious help-mates; we dare think; and we at length assert
those

those rights which nature formed us to enjoy."

"Prodigiously presuming!" said Lord Arcot.

"If there be arrogance in truth, I must plead guilty," interrupted I.—As I spoke the servant entered the room, to inform me that Scamper had, that instant, expired. I shuddered while she communicated the intelligence; for there is no event more dreadful to a feeling mind than the death of a being whose days have presented a series of criminality! and how much more would punishment without the forfeiture of life, tend to the benefit of society, as well as the promotion of religion, than the judgment which sends the guilty wretch to his account,

"With all his imperfections on his head!"

I now requested Lord Arcot to leave me: his Lordship was little pleased with

the conversation which had passed, and readily obeyed. As soon as he had departed, the servant, with a countenance pale and agitated, informed me, that she believed Mr. Scamper had business of a dreadful nature to communicate before his death: that he muttered something about a dying lady, a packet of letters, and a highway robbery.

A new light seemed to break in upon my gloom of despondency; and an instinctive sensation instantly rushing through my heart, informed me that ~~Scamper~~ was the person who had left the papers with Mrs. Ferret, and afterwards robbed her on her way to Chel-
~~sea. That she~~ have been in his possession did not surprise me, when I recollected that he was present at Lady Denmore's death, when, in the anguish of regret, I forgot the packet. My vexation was painful in the extreme: once more so near regaining the talisman which

which was destined to regulate my fate; and again losing every hope of its recovery, by Lord Arcot's obtrusive visit, I was almost frantic.

As soon as the violence of my distress had wasted itself in tears, I recollected the nature of my situation: in a solitary cottage, far from every friend, if friends I had on the vast globe; my only companion a trembling simple girl, who was a stranger to me; and the only object which I had to contemplate, the corpse of a guilty wretch, whose ghastly features would terrify me to madness. To remain amidst such a variety of horrors would have been insupportable: and how to fly from them I knew not; for, to my other griefs, the pressure of pecuniary want now menaced me, and by its torturing stings seemed to complete the climax of my misfortunes.

I had only four guineas in my possession; the day was rapidly declining; and

the idea of passing the night at the cottage was insupportable. After desiring the servant to search Mr. Scamper's apartment, and obtaining no intelligence respecting my papers, I presented the kind attendant half my property, conjured her to take steps for the interment of the body ; and, as the sun was sinking in the horizon, set out on foot, with a small bundle of cloaths, unconscious whether I was going, or where I should that night find a place to shelter me.

I crossed the skirts of Arcot-park, and taking a narrow path along the fields, began to ruminate on the vicissitudes of my fortune. The evening was glowing ; but the soft breezes from the neighbouring hills revived me, as I hastily pursued my way, fearless of every danger. On my passing an upland meadow, I looked back on the valley. I observed the contrast between the luxurious abode of an eastern despot, and the
low

low thatched cottage where a no less guilty wretch expiated his offence by an untimely death: a sigh relieved my heart, and the philosophy of an uncontaminated spirit whispered, "Gertrude, more happy art thou in the poverty of rectitude than the gilded caitiff, who, though his crimes are hid beneath a shield of gold, is still the slave of a persecuting conscience!"

I continued walking till I came to a narrow lane bordered on each side by a row of venerable elms, and terminating in a close wood, which was so thickly interwoven that its gloom seemed almost impervious. I now perceived that I had lost my way, and that there was no track of carriages which might lead me to hope I should again strike into the high road towards Cheltenham. My perplexity was considerably augmented by the rapid close of twilight; and I stood, dur-

ing several minutes, pondering on my situation. I had at least measured three miles, and my exhausted frame partook of the mental fatigue which rendered me incapable of every exertion. My prospect was terrible: I expected to be benighted in a wood, which, to my startled imagination, appeared almost impenetrable. I would have retrodden the long avenue, but the dusky vapours which now enveloped the sky, rendered the perspective gloomy beyond description: to proceed was hazardous; to turn back would have been still more desperate: day closed, and I was almost hopeless, when I heard the distant tinkling of a sheep-bell: I stood still to listen; the vibration continued; and in a few minutes the whistling of a shepherd-boy inspired me with new courage. I traced the cheering sound to a glen on the opposite side of the wood; and,
urged

urged by the solitude of my situation, I rushed amidst the gloom with the determination to overtake it.

My feet seemed winged as I measured the lonely path; and, in a short time, I found myself on the borders of the wood. The bell continued to tinkle, and I could now hear the footsteps of the shepherd on the dry turf, where he was preparing to pen his fold. I darted from the gloom which I had passed, and flew towards him. Alarmed at the sight of so unexpected a wanderer, and filled with the superstitious terrors which never fail to attend a contracted education, my white dress and swiftly-gliding form conveyed to his mind the idea of a supernatural being. The boy hastened as speedily as his feet would carry him across the glen, while I followed without the power to utter a syllable.

Thus we continued to exert our speed till we reached a lofty gate of gloomy antiquity.

antiquity. The dark ivy which covered the stone rendered it at this dusky hour black and stupendous. The boy passed a court-yard, and hastening towards a gothic door, entered suddenly, and closed it. I was too much rejoiced to find any thing like a peopled habitation to relinquish my pursuit; therefore loudly beating at the door, desired admittance.

In a few moments a female made her appearance: she inquired what brought me thither, alone, and on foot, at such a dreary hour. Her voice seemed familiar to me; and on the boy bringing a light, I instantly recognized my friend Mrs. Walters, the good old housekeeper of Denmore Castle.

I embraced her with rapture: she shed tears of joy at seeing me: a thousand questions rapidly followed, and I was ushered into a spacious oak parlour, where a small table was prepared for supper.

I now

I now inquired whether she could accommodate me with a bed for one night. "Aye, for twenty!" cried she, again hugging me with unfeigned delight: "but first you must eat and drink, and compose your spirits," added the kind-hearted creature. I knew not how to express my gratitude; but taking a chair, (the lad who had been my involuntary guide placing a brown jug of ale on the table plentifully covered with food,) I accepted her offer, for my strength was nearly subdued by fatigue and want of nourishment.

My sensations on finding once more a friend to solace me, may be imagined, but cannot be described. It was in vain that I attempted to explain my situation; Mrs. Walters would not hear me till I had partaken of her supper: and though my exhausted state would scarcely allow of my speaking, yet I felt the necessity
of

of accounting to her for the singularity of my visit.

As soon as I had recovered from my surprize, I proposed unravelling the mystery of my night's adventure ; but Mrs. Walters requested that I would defer the detail till the following morning : " you want repose, my dear child," said she ; " I will see you safe to your chamber ; there is nothing here that can disturb you, and as I always ring the house-bell at ten o'clock as a signal that the family must retire to bed, I will not break through my invariable custom, but immediately attend you."

We rose from table, and passing through the hall, where a number of rustic servants awaited the word of command from the housekeeper, ascended to my chamber. The bed was after the fashion of the last century ; the furniture no less gothic in its appearance ; the
wainscot

wainscot was, like the floor, of brown oak highly polished; and the whole of the apartment was calculated to excite a superstitious horror. I was, however, too much fatigued to contemplate, for any length of time, such unimportant objects: the weariness of a wasted spirit stole over my eyes, and I had scarcely placed my head upon my pillow before I totally forgot my situation.

Sleep, when it is the effect of excessive fatigue, is generally disturbed and transient: for a time the senses yield to the influence of Nature, but the feverish lassitude which accompanies such repose deprives it of the sweetly-soothing power which tranquil minds experience. My slumber was of short duration, startlish, and disturbed by confused visions of the brain; I awoke soon after day-break. On first opening my eyes, I was at a loss to recollect myself: the lofty bed, the antique chamber, so strikingly contrast-
ed

ed the cottage, where I had passed my latest hours, in the chamber of a dead friend, that I was alarmed before I had recovered the power of reflection. My heart beat convulsively during several minutes: the remembrance of all that had recently happened tended to increase the gloomy impressions, which the pale light of morning, and the stillness of my lonely chamber augmented every moment.

Conscious that I could not sleep, and indeed dreading even the chance of forgetfulness, lest dreams of a terrifying nature should augment my nervous inquietude, I summoned resolution to quit my bed. On approaching the window I discovered that the house stood on the banks of the Severn, romantically opening to a chain of hills, lofty, and picturesque. Soothed by the prospect, which brightened every moment as the sun rose from the horizon, I opened the

long gothic casement, and indulged my mind by contemplating its beauty: the gradual descent to the swift-gliding river, was covered with turf, which sprinkled with dew-drops, glittered in the morning lustre. The adjacent acclivities were still scattered with broken clouds, which floated around them, while through their grey vapours the eye was amused by a pleasing assemblage of tufted herbage, thatched cottages, winding paths, and variegated woodlands.

I soon felt my courage renovated, and ventured to quit my chamber. In a small adjoining closet, which was filled with old books, I found a writing-desk; and to my infinite delight, every means of communicating the events which compose this tedious letter. You will, at least, if it fails to amuse you, rejoice to know that I am once more lodged in a safe and tranquil asylum, where I bid you, my dear Frances, a short farewell.

LETTER LXXXIX.

The Same to the Same.

August 24, 1797.

THE family rose early, and at seven o'clock I received a visit from Mrs. Walters, who expressing her surprise at seeing me dressed, informed me that breakfast waited. I descended with her to the oak parlour, and we soon entered into conversation on the subject of my extraordinary situation. Mrs. Walters without hesitation acquainted me with all that had passed since my departure from Denmore Castle ; at the same time assuring me, that my absence had been a source of regret to the whole family.

To

To a being whom the world had treated so unkindly, this intelligence could not fail to afford some consolation ; and from those who could derive no possible advantage from their affection, the proof of regard came doubly acceptable ; for whether it originates in a contracted education, a limited degree of intellectual expansion, or a consciousness of servitude, I will not pretend to assert ; but unquestionably the liberal virtues, gratitude, and disinterested attachment, are now very rarely to be found among the uncultivated orders of society : with them self-love is the predominating passion, the main spring of action ; the source of every undertaking, and the object which actuates every apparent assiduity. This rule is not without some exceptions, but the examples worthy of applause are so few, and the instances of low hypocrisy, insolence, and interested cunning so common,

mon, that the evils of existence are uniformly augmented, in proportion as we are liable to the effects of their machinations.

Mrs. Walters informed me, that after my departure from the Castle it was almost entirely deserted by Lord Denmore: that Mr. and Mrs. Pew frequently came to inquire for me, and never without shedding tears of regret, that I had quitted the parsonage and their protection. Every additional proof that I was not wholly deserted by affectionate natures, that memory had not entirely been closed against me and my misfortunes, served to revive my spirits, ~~now nearly exhaust-~~ed by affliction. Yet, alas! Frances, my renovating hopes seemed like the partial sun-beams which penetrate the thickening storm, vivid, but not lasting.

I frequently inquired the name and rank of the possessor of her present habitation; but Mrs. Walters informed me,

me, that she had never seen him: she had been recommended to the place she held in the establishment by Lady Arcot's *femme de chambre*; and though she had lived in the manor-house more than three months, its owner had never once been there. "He is lately come to this estate," said Mrs. Walters, "and has been very ill in London nearly the whole summer." I now began to tremble; and as soon as I summoned resolution to speak, again addressed her.

"Do you expect him soon?" said I.

"I have waited his coming these five days," replied Mrs. Walters. "A messenger came here to order that the house may be aired, and every thing made ready for his arrival, with a young Lady, whom he intends to marry; a rich heiress, but a little disordered in her senses."

"Your master's name?" said I with a faltering voice.

"Somer-

“Sornerton,” replied Mrs. Walters. I leant upon her arm to support myself. She observed my countenance, as it suddenly changed, and reaching me a chair, I sunk into it almost overpowered with astonishment. The good woman’s concern was evident; she had not the faintest idea that Somerton was the new name of the infamous Treville; or that the supposed maniac was your ill-fated friend. After a few moments of recollection, in which I endeavoured to summon all my fortitude, I again addressed her:

“My worthy woman,” said I, “you know not whom you serve; you are unconscious that the possessor of this mansion is the most atrocious villain beneath the sun.”

“Heaven forbid!” exclaimed Mrs. Walters, trembling, “for he is a friend of Lady Arcot’s.”

“That

“That title does not give him any additional claim to respectability,” said I; “for dignity of mental worth is not always the passport to exalted bosoms; we see the most abandoned, the most unprincipled persons sanctioned in the highest sphere of patronage, while rectitude and genius are condemned to toil amidst the humiliations of poverty and scorn.”

“Alas! it is indeed a pity,” sighed Mrs. Walters; “but what can those mortals do who are not blessed with power and affluence?”

“Resist oppression,” said I.

“And what good will that produce,” interrupted Mrs. Walters; “while fortune is their foe, they would but toil to no purpose; for gold will buy obedience from one half the world at least, and very few indeed will take part with the unfortunate.” The truth of this observation silenced me; I felt it strike upon my heart,

heart, and a feebly-resisting sigh was my only comment.

“ Perhaps you have been misinformed,” said Mrs. Walters ; “ indeed I am fully persuaded that it must be so, for Mr. Somerton is a man of family and consequence.”

“ Therefore his errors are sanctioned, and his name rescued from that disgrace which a more obscure offender would inevitably suffer,” said I ; “ with a mind naturally vicious he set out early in life as a travelling tutor to an exalted profligate. The luxurious regions of France and Italy did not fail to foster every evil propensity, and to subdue every latent virtue, that conscience taught to struggle in his bosom. On his return to England he became the associate of nobles, the idol of our sex, the envy of his own ; till by the influence he acquired in the fashionable world, he proved himself equally experienced in the various occupations

pations of a bear-leader, a sycophant, and a toad-eater."

Mrs. Walters started: she was a stranger to the meaning of those titles; and believing them in their literal sense, seemed to shudder with horror. "I will serve him no longer," said she: "a bear-leader, and a toad-eater! Merciful Heavens! Why the man is little better than a monster." I could scarcely refrain from smiling.

"I must depart immediately," said I. "Already a sufferer more than once by the machinations of Mr. Somerton, I have no hope of future safety but in avoiding his presence: for you will be astonished when I tell you, that the wretch, under whose roof you have so kindly sheltered me, is no other than Mr. Treville; and the supposed maniac whom he wished to enthrall by a forced marriage, was myself."

“ You don’t tell me so !” exclaimed Mrs. Walters, throwing her arms about my neck, and with tears in her eyes, embracing me. “ We will go together, my dear Miss Gertrude,” added the kind-hearted creature ; “ we will not sleep under the roof of such a wicked mortal. I have often heard of his sad doings, when he was at Denmore Castle ; and of his seducing my poor lady ; and causing all the affliction which the whole family suffered.”

“ I cannot consent to your quitting the manor-house on my account,” said I. “ Perhaps it will be an advantageous situation ; and I shall regret the injury which you will sustain, because my adverse fortune prevents the possibility of my making you any compensation.”

“ Do not think about that,” replied Mrs. Walters ; “ for I would rather serve the poorest master that was honest,
than

than the first of our nobility with such a character as Mr. Somerton's; besides," added she, "no woman is safe under the roof of such a profligate. I shall certainly avoid danger before it is too late; for what can be expected from one who leads bears, and is a toad-eater?" I could not suppress a smile, which vanity, so natural to the human heart, occasioned: and I considered the good Mrs. Walters, uttering her fears of a personal insult, as an additional proof that, in our sex, the idea of possessing powers of attraction seldom deserts the mind till it loses all the faculties of memory or reflection. While we were conversing, a sociable stopped at the gate: and how shall I describe my agitation, when I beheld Lord and Lady Arcot, with their amiable friends, Lord and Lady Melcomb. They all instantly descended, and rushed into the court-yard; I had just time to avoid meeting them, by
G 2 hastening

hastening to my chamber, and impatiently waiting for their departure.

Near an hour passed before Mrs. Walters came to relieve me from my state of painful anxiety. As soon as she entered the room, I perceived that she had heard news of importance. Her face was pale, and she trembled excessively. "The vengeance of Heaven has overtaken the wicked wretch!" said she.

"Is he dead?" interrupted I, with a presentiment of horror, which almost arrested the powers of articulation.

"Not absolutely dead," replied Mrs. Walters; "but dying. The devil will have his own somehow or other; and Mr. Somerton is at last brought to answer for his crimes."

"By whom?" said I eagerly.

"That is more than I know," replied Mrs. Walters.

"Tell me all you have heard," said I; "for I am more deeply interested in this event than you can imagine."

"I heard

“ I heard but little,” answered Mrs. Walters. “ All that my Lady Arcot wanted to know was, whether he had been brought home to die at the manor-house ; for she had been informed that he was not expected to live many days, when the messenger left him.”

“ What messenger ?” interrupted I. “ When and where did she say he had been last seen ?”

“ She did not mention either the time or place,” cried Mrs. Walters ; “ but she told me that she should call or send again in the evening, to know whether I have received any intelligence ; for she seemed very anxious respecting Mr. Somerton’s safety.”

“ What is to be done ?” said I, with the utmost agitation. “ A thousand fears are awakened in my heart ; and, if my presentiment be true, another pang is yet destined to affail it. Mrs. Walters perceiving my distress, conjured me to com-

pose my spirits ; with a promise, that when Lady Arcot returned, she would endeavour to obtain satisfactory intelligence. After a few moments of reflection, I resolved on remaining one night longer at the manor-house. I know not why, but I felt an almost unconquerable desire to see Mr. Somerton before he paid the forfeit of his temerity ; no doubt remaining in my mind but that he had fallen in a rencontre with Edward Ashgrove.

You will easily imagine what were the sensations of my soul on hearing this ambiguous intelligence. My fancy involuntarily dwelt on the grave of poor Mary, and the pangs she had endured for her fond reliance on the professions of a villain. Memory then wandered back to the last scene of Lady Denmore's sorrows. I shuddered as I recollected their melancholy progress, their torturing termination. Ah, Frances !
then

then how rapidly, how instinctively did my thoughts retrace those early scenes, when, in a guardian's attentions, I experienced almost a father's fondness : when my hours flew swiftly on the gay path of life, which fancy strewed with flowers !

I must relinquish my pen ; for memory will conjure up such visions as will make my soul shrink into inanity. My hour is not yet come : Heaven knows, when it arrives I shall meet it with that resignation which is the result of long and hopeless sorrow.—Farewell.

LETTER XC.

The Same to the Same.

August 25, 1797.

THE day passed slowly. Mrs. Walters persisted in her determination to quit the manor-house ; and all my persuasions could not induce her to relinquish her purpose. The abhorrence which she expressed of Mr. Somerton's conduct, the sympathy which she felt when she retraced the many atrocities he had practised, and the wish to accompany me were not to be over-ruled by any interested consideration: and finding every intreaty, on my part, fail, we agreed on the following day to set out for London: to remain there a very short period, and from thence to proceed for Denmore parsonage.

I ardently

I ardently long once more to embrace the good Rector and his amiable partner. I feel an intuitive impulse which seems to draw my footsteps towards their tranquil habitation. Sickened by the disgusting scenes of tumultuous life, and weary of the world's duplicity, I sigh for the repose of solitude, the society of rational beings. I have long been buffeted by the storms of a disastrous destiny; and my soul pants for that peaceful haven where I shall rest.

I will not indulge the mournful preface: I will endeavour to shake off the idea, which by long indulgence has taken possession of my mind: it is more than weak; it is little less than criminal.

Evening has arrived, and no message is yet come from Lady Arcot. I nothing important shall occur before to-morrow, at noon we purpose setting out for London. I promised Mr. Ashgrove that I would follow him to the New Forest:

But the memory of my lost friend would render that spot a scene of regret, too poignant for my heart to bear at this momentous period. Whatever plan I may determine to adopt, you shall not fail to know it: for the sanction of such friendship as yours will sustain my fortitude under every trial.—Adieu.

LETTER XCI.

The Same to the Same.

August 27, 1797.

TIME moved tardily; till Mrs. Walters, observing the anxiety of my mind, proposed going to Arcot Hall, in order to obtain all the intelligence which had arrived respecting Mr. Somerton. I objected to her departure on account
of

of the lateness of the hour, it being near ten o'clock when she suggested her intention. Yet she perceived by my manner, which expressed the undecided state of my mind, that I anxiously wished to hear if any thing new had transpired; and without farther ceremony, she ordered one of the old domestics to prepare a horse with a pillion, and to attend her on the friendly expedition.

It was impossible to refrain from smiling, when Mrs. Walters, in her green joseph, made her appearance. A sports-woman of the last century would have presented a less gothic figure: but the motive of her short journey soon overpowered the ridiculous effect which her person produced; and I attended her to the outward gate, where the servant, who rode before her, taking a lantern, I watched them briskly trotting down the long avenue, till their light diminished to the size of a glow-worm.

The reflections which followed were favourable to human nature ; and I joyfully cherished the hope, that unsophisticated beings, removed from the extensive circles of society, were yet strangers to the vices of the world. The friendly conduct of Mrs. Walters more than compensated for the folly, meanness, and hypocrisy of those whom, in my journey through busy scenes, I had been destined to encounter.

With a mind absorbed by meditation, I returned along the court-yard, and entered the oak-room ; where the absence of my venerable friend seemed to throw a deepened gloom on every object ; but I remained only a short time in the parlour ; for having letters to write, and the family always supping in the adjoining hall, I concluded that I should be more retired and tranquil in my chamber.

The night was excessively sultry, and my spirits considerably fatigued by

the ruminations of the past day ; I therefore resolved, if possible, to compose my mind, and to await the return of Mrs. Walters with patience. An hour passed, and I began to expect her home ; but, recollecting the distance to Arcot Hall, the mode of my friend's travelling, and the many questions she would be obliged to ask, I tacitly reprov'd my mind for its impatience, and resolved to seek some amusement till her arrival.

I observed many old books in a closet adjacent to my chamber ; and I read a few pages of several volumes with a restlessness of thought which defeated my purpose. I often repaired to the Gothic casement, to contemplate the solemn scenery of woods and vallies, then visible by the clear light of the moon, which had risen above the neighbouring mountains. The Severn flowed swiftly, with a rippling, lulling sound, beneath my window ; and the wind, blowing
from

from the south, seemed to refresh the earth, whose scorched surface imbibed the dew that cast a blue mist over it. Fancy led me back to the seclusion of our early studies ; and I was repeating the beautiful stanzas of Beattie's Hermit, when I heard the outward gate-bell rung with violence.

I started from my poetical reverie, and hastily descended to the hall. A strangely confused noise in the courtyard awakened apprehensions for the safety of Mrs. Walters ; and my terrors were augmented, when I saw several of the servants supporting a person evidently feeble. I rushed towards the group ; but how, Frances, shall I describe my astonishment, when I perceived Mr. Somerton, pale, ghastly, and exhausted?

He was too severely agonized to notice me, by the glimmering light of the lantern which a boy carried before him. My situation was now perplexing and
painful :

painful: I shuddered, while my heart throbbed with curiosity: I longed, yet feared to inquire after Edward Ashgrove: I anticipated the effect which my presence would inevitably produce on the mind of the guilty Somerton. He was led to a spacious apartment on the ground-floor of the manor-house; where, he being placed on a sofa, through the window I observed him. His countenance was terrific; his eyes sunk and hollow; his cheek livid; his lip colourless; and his whole frame convulsed with corporeal as well as mental agonies. A thrilling sensation of horror, which was undescrivable, rushed through my heart; and the cold drops started from my forehead, as though the hand of death was on me.

While I was contemplating this picture of Heaven's just indignation, I observed him deliver a letter to one of the servants, who instantly quitted the room; and

and mounting his horse, already waiting in the court-yard, proceeded swiftly down the avenue.

I now entered the house, and repeated my inquiries respecting Mrs. Walters, whose return I awaited with more impatience than ever; particularly, as I recollected that, in my perplexed state of mind, when she departed, I had wholly forgot to request that she would not mention my being at the manor-house. Perplexities now seemed to accumulate rapidly; and each succeeding vexation appeared more trying than the last: yet I had not resolution to depart, till I could fully inform myself of Edward's fate, and of the event which had reduced Mr. Somerton to such imminent peril.

It was past midnight when Mrs. Walters returned, accompanied by Lord and Lady Arcot, and attended by the servant who had been dispatched on horseback with the letter. By this time
Mr.

Mr. Somerton was removed to a chamber adjoining to that in which I had slept the preceding night. The whole house was a scene of confusion; Lady Arcot flying from room to room like one that was distracted; the servants terrified at their new master's situation; and Lord Arcot swearing vehemently, that it was "prodigiously ridiculous for a man to breed a rumpus in the neighbourhood at such an unseasonable hour; particularly after having decamped from Arcot-Hall, without taking leave of the family: he had no notion of such underhanded proceedings; and if my Lady chose to worrit herself about such a coxcomb, he should return home without her." This threat was uttered in a tone too loud to admit of a supposition that Lady Arcot was within hearing; for domestic dominion was not one of those privileges which the ennobled nabob asserted:

serted : he, like most despots, had tyrannized over the unhappy, till he was, in his turn, the vassal of a tyrant. At one o'clock Mrs. Walters entered my chamber; but her countenance, when I flew to meet her, almost petrified me with affliction: it was cold and reserved: she drew back; and with an austere tone of voice, informed me, that she could no longer be my friend, for reasons which at a convenient period she would explain more fully.

I had not power to demand an elucidation of conduct so extraordinary: my surprize was evident; and she, taking advantage of the silence which it occasioned, immediately quitted the room. Language cannot describe what I felt at this moment of humiliation: I hastened to my chamber, almost frantic; and having made up the small bundle of cloaths which I brought with me from
the

the cottage, I have resolved to escape from the manor-house as soon as day breaks. Waiting that approaching period, I conclude my letter.

LETTER XCII.

The Same to the Same.

August 29, 1797.

DURING the remainder of the time before dawn-light, I heard a confused whispering in the gallery which led to my chamber. At first it alarmed me; but I concluded that it was Lady Arcot and Mrs. Walters, or some domestic of the family, and my apprehensions vanished. Long and tedious did the moments seem, while I watched at my window for the glimpse of day; and highly did my
my

my heart beat, when the grey light began to gleam above the mountains. I now hoped to effect my escape without interruption, for every thing was perfectly still; and a lad, who was generally up the first of the family, and who had led me to the manor-house, had been ordered to rise before the sun, in case he should be wanted.

Still I was reluctant to depart at enmity with Mrs. Walters; unconscious of having done any thing that could possibly offend her; and knowing, by fatal experience, that half the animosities which rankle in the human breast originate in error, and take root because no effort is made for their extermination. We meet our dearest friends at moments when our minds are unharmonized by the perplexities of existence: we are cold, thoughtful, or embarrassed; but we do not take the trouble to explain our motives, and we wound their sensibility
while

while we are tacitly indulging our own. From this period we find them changed and sceptical; our pride takes up arms in defiance of our judgment, and we mark that being as an enemy, whom, by more ingenuous conduct, we should still love and value.

These ideas made me anxious to see Mrs. Walters previous to my quitting the manor-house; and as the rays of morning were rapidly advancing from the horizon, I felt the conviction that there was no time to lose; I therefore stole softly from my chamber, and proceeded towards that in which I concluded she still slept; for the tranquillity which reigned throughout the whole house induced me to conclude that Lord and Lady Arcot had taken their departure. I found Mrs. Walters already risen, for she had only thrown herself for an hour upon her bed, without undressing. I conjured her to explain the mysterious
reserve

reserve which I had experienced the preceding night ; and to tell me wherein I had unintentionally offended. Her answer was brief, but decisive : “ You have deceived me ; you have also deceived Lady Arcot ; and, believing you to be a wicked, artful girl, I have for ever done with you.”

I now instantly perceived the cause of the sudden change in her manner towards me. I naturally concluded that Lady Arcot had been my calumniator ; and that my quitting her house with Mr. Somerton had afforded her revenge this ample source of gratification. I also felt assured that Mrs. Walters had incautiously mentioned my concealment at the manor-house ; and that nothing less than the ruin of my reputation would now satisfy my malignant persecutor.

It was in vain that I conjured Mrs. Walters to name the species of impropriety of which I had been accused :
she

she replied, that she was sworn to secrecy, and that before many hours passed I should know all I wished upon the subject, from those who had a right to condemn me. This answer only served to augment my alarm and chagrin, and to point out the necessity for my immediate departure: "Indeed," said I, sighing deeply, "I am not guilty of any premeditated crime, but I know that Lady Arcot is my accuser, and that her rancour will not let the ill-fated being escape on whom it has once fastened."

"Lady Arcot was your friend," said Mrs. Walters; "she wished to reconcile you to Lord Denmore, but you thought fit to elope from her protection with Mr. Somerton, and to make me the dupe of your artful contrivances; but, thank Heaven, this is the first time I was ever made convenient to such abominable doings. I now believe all I heard about
poor

poor Lady Denmore, and I make no doubt but the story of your shooting Mr. Somerton in a fit of jealousy was as true as the Gospel." I uttered no answer; I could neither deny my having wounded Mr. Somerton, nor my recent escape from Arcot-Hall; therefore dreading a farther investigation of my conduct, I resolved, without delay, to commence my journey.

Passing the door of Mr. Somerton's chamber, I met Lady Arcot, who was at that moment quitting it: her indignant glance was followed by an exclamation of astonishment, at the same moment that she grasped my hand, and demanded whither I was going. I made no reply. She now called for assistance: "Help," said she, "help me, once more to secure this runaway profligate."

"Here at least, Lady Arcot," said I, "you have no right to detain me; the violence which I have experienced under

der your roof, rendered my escape the effect of desperation: if I have cause to repent my rashness, I may attribute my regret to the inhumanity of your conduct."

"To your criminal attachment, your absurd and persevering fondness for Mr. Somerton," replied Lady Arcot, still holding my hand, which I in vain endeavoured to wrest from her. Several persons had now assembled in the gallery, and I was nearly overpowered by their united efforts to detain me, when a servant, from Mr. Somerton's chamber, informed me that my presence was requested immediately. Lady Arcot turned pale, and started:

"By whom?" said she.

"By Mr. Somerton," replied the messenger.

"She shall not enter the room," cried her Ladyship, with evident agitation; "she shall go back with me to

Arcot-Hall, where her past and present indiscretions shall be judged by Lord Denmore." The servant returned to Mr. Somerton; but in a few moments came again with a peremptory message, that I should not on any pretext whatever quit the manor-house till he had seen me. "My master has business of importance to communicate respecting Miss St. Leger's lost papers," continued the messenger, "and he must see her without further delay."

I could not restrain my exultation: I smiled on my humbled tyrant, and with a tone of scornful triumph, demanded whether she was now satisfied.

"I am at least determined," answered she; "and you shall go with me, or I will perish." At this moment Lord Arcot, who had been an inactive spectator of the whole scene, thought it time to interpose. "My Lady," said he, with a timid voice, "this is prodigiously

digiously outrageous; Miss is no property of yours, and if she chooses to expose herself, why, she must take the consequences.

“ My Lord, I command you to be silent,” cried Lady Arcot, “ I am the best judge of my own actions, and till you are wiser, I shall not ask your counsel.”

“ Prodigious !” exclaimed the Nabob. “ Truth in these ambiguous times is prodigious,” replied Lady Arcot; “ Miss St. Leger is the adopted charge of Lord Denmore, and till he again receives her under his protection, she shall not escape from mine; for who knows but she may be the unowned offspring of a person of rank, and was born to move in the circles of splendour.”

“ Your Ladyship is prodigiously considerate,” cried Lord Arcot; “ but, for my part, I think her birth of little
H 2 importance.

importance. If she belongs to nobody, what signifies who was her father?"

"I differ with you in opinion," said Lady Arcot; "if she be the illegitimate offspring of a person of fashion, she will find protection which a poor man's child would have no right to hope for."

"O, fie! my Lady!" exclaimed Lord Arcot; "you talk prodigiously immoral, for if bastards of rank are to be countenanced there will soon be an end to chastity; the only thing which keeps forward Misses in awe, is the fear of disgrace, and if their misbegotten progeny are to be sanctioned by the Great, the priest will soon be out of fashion."

"Ridiculous!" said Lady Arcot, "you speak like a blockhead; have we not seen girls of the most abandoned origin permitted to adopt the family names of our first Nobility, merely because there

was

was a shadow of probability that their blood was ennobled on the father's side."

"The more is the shame," replied Lord Arcot, "for if such a plan gets into practice, we shall see a race of self-named bastards perking themselves up, even in the drawing-room at St. James's, while poor fellows' brats are sent to the parish, or stigmatised for their illegitimacy."

"Well; and it should be so," cried Lady Arcot; "for if people of consequence do not sanction their own errors, who will do it for them? and I am sure, my Lord, you have no right to condemn the custom, for nobody living has proved more unequivocally that power is superior to right, than your Lordship."

"Yes, or I never should have seen your Ladyship received in the great world," replied Lord Arcot.

“ This is little to the purpose,” said her Ladyship, reddening with anger, “ I shall not relinquish my authority to detain Miss St. Leger till she is restored to Lord Denmore’s; therefore, if she does not avow herself Mr. Somerton’s mistress, she must consent to return with me to Arcot-Hall without further hesitation.” At this moment another message from Mr. Somerton was delivered, and it expressed an impatient desire to see me immediately.

“ Then *I* will be present,” said Lady Arcot; “ Mr. Somerton can have nothing to communicate which I may not with propriety hear.” We entered the room: the libertine was dressed, but he reclined upon his bed; his countenance seemed the index of an agonized and guilty mind, for he was now nearly reduced to that state of anguish which the memory of unpunished crimes never fails to inflict upon the soul; he had,
till

till that period, braved the reprover, Conscience; but the licentious caitiff, the arch profligate now approached a tribunal where neither the effrontery of vice, nor the patronage of the exalted, could exonerate his infamy. He seemed to shrink with horror; his eyes, the moment they met mine, were averted, and his lips quivered convulsively while he attempted to express his feelings: he was no more the daring bold-faced villain; the being who smiled at the reproaches of the injured, or set the vengeance of a just Creator at defiance; this was the hour which proved him but a coward, a superficial, arrogant impostor.

What a train of ideas arose in my mind, to blacken even the darkest shades of his character; how naturally did memory turn to the murdered Lady Denmore, the persecuted Mary; and how did my heart shudder when I beheld a monster, whom, had there been honour

in man, or sensibility in woman, the world would have seen an outcast from society.

Mr. Somerton, after many painful conflicts, for his callous heart was at length taught to feel compunction, opened a writing-case which stood near his pillow, and instantly took from it the mysterious packet. I darted towards him. "Have patience but a few moments," said he, "and I will explain all that has happened." I thought I should have fainted.

"These papers," continued Mr. Somerton, "I found on your departure from Edgware. I opened them; I have read their contents, they interest no breathing creature but yourself. Knowing this to be the case, I employed Scamper to find you: for many weeks he endeavoured in vain to discover your retreat, till at last, by accident, he met and followed you. The packet was then
left

left at your lodgings. He informed me of what he had done : I blamed him for having trusted papers of such importance to a stranger's hand ; and he assured me, on my promise of a liberal reward, that, at the peril of his life, he would regain them. He kept his word.

“ On his arrival at Cheltenham, whither he had pursued Mrs. Ferret, he found you there. Intelligence was instantly dispatched to me, at Arcot-Hall ; and by stratagem you were brought thither. All that has since occurred, you are informed of.” Mr. Somerton seemed nearly exhausted ; he reclined his head upon his pillow, while the important packet trembled in his hand. My anxiety, my impatience, would scarcely permit me to wait till his renovated strength would enable him to proceed. The hour, thought I, is now arrived when all my perplexities will terminate ; at least those which owe their
H 5 origin

origin to the incertitude of my hopes respecting Lord Denmore's future protection. Ah, Frances! how torturing to a proud and sensible mind is the necessity of accepting services from those whom we ought to hate! How little can the pleasures of the world exhilarate that heart which palpitates under the agonizing pressure of dependence!

After a few minutes silence, Mr. Somerton resumed the discourse. "In this casket," said he, "you will find some jewels of considerable value: they were Lady Denmore's: keep them for her sake."

I shivered while memory took a brief retrospect of events; but the sensation was transient, for all my attention seemed absorbed in the prospect of the moment. The case of jewels was placed on a table near which I sat, agitated and waiting with speechless solicitude. Mr. Somerton hesitated as he again addressed

me;

me; and his eyes seemed looking inward on his soul, while they assumed an expression at once vacant and ghastly. Silence again followed, to give time for the tacit monitor, Conscience, when I heard hasty footsteps approaching the chamber; and before I could even guess at the intruder, Lord Denmore presented himself.

I rose hastily as he entered the room; but the sudden effect of surprise and terror took from my limbs the power of motion, and I should have sunk upon the floor, had not his arms sustained me. I buried my face in his bosom; while a convulsive tremour shook my heart almost to annihilation. He raised me on my feet: I still grasped his arm, and hid my features on it. Oh, Frances! had I been, at that moment, the most criminal of mortals, I could not have felt a more acute sensation, when Lord Denmore exclaimed, “Perdition!

Somerton here ! rash girl ! lost, lost Gertrude ! what a scene is this for a friend to witness !

“ Oh, my Lord ! speak, speak once more ; utter the name of friend, and I will bear your severest reproaches,” said I. Then glancing at Somerton, I beheld him leaning his head upon his folded arms, and resting them on his pillow. At this moment the packet which had dropped from his grasp, met Lord Denmore’s eyes : “ Merciful God !” exclaimed he, “ the handwriting, the seal of Lady Denmore ! what can it mean ?”

“ Forbear, my Lord,” said I, while I held his arm to prevent his breaking the seals ; “ on the importance of the papers which that packet contains, my fate depends. Profane not the last request of Lady Denmore.” His limbs seemed palsied : he fixed his eyes on mine, feebly articulating, “ What can
it

it mean? The last request of Lady Denmore! Of my ill-fated wife!" Again he glanced with a terrifying horror at Mr. Somerton, who had not courage to behold the being whose soul he, at that moment, agitated almost to frenzy.

Lord Denmore, pressing one hand upon his forehead, while the other grasped the packet, continued, "God of mercies! how am I to decide in this distracting situation? Too probably do I guess at the contents of this parcel; and yet I have not resolution to unclothe it." Then turning towards me, he added, with a tone of voice at once deep and impressive, "Are you sure, Gertrude, that these papers were sealed by Lady Denmore?"

"Ah, my Lord! those hands which now are mouldering in the tomb, folded and sealed them." Lord Denmore shivered.

"Enough,

“ Enough, enough,” said he wildly ;
“ Be the task yours, Gertrude : open them : but if they are of a nature such as I suspect, even though Lady Denmore sealed them, and though her hands be mouldering in the tomb, your eye must never behold them.”

“ My Lord ! I dare not,” said I, returning the parcel to him ; “ I dare not, under such doubtful circumstances, unfold a single paper. Yet, if I must perish, at least let me behold the instrument of death : let me not expire in this dreadful, this mysterious dream ! Awaken me ! I am prepared for the worst that can befall me ; convinced that, in this world, my lot is anguish.”

“ You must accompany me without delay,” said Lord Denmore.

“ To the farthest part of the universe !” answered I.

“ Indeed !”

“ Indeed !” murmured he, with a penetrating look, which made my cheek redden.

“ Indeed, my Lord !” repeated I, firmly ; “ with whom can I be so safe, so happy ?”

Mr. Somerton now ventured to raise his head. “ Lord Denmore,” said he, “ my life is at your disposal.”

“ Keep it, and repent then,” replied my guardian (for ah, Frances ! he again deserves the title). Mr. Somerton had not power to utter another syllable. Lord Denmore, securing the packet in his bosom, led me to his carriage, which was still in waiting ; and we immediately departed. Scarcely any conversation passed till we reached Cheltenham ; where, being left to rest, I conclude my letter, with a mind full of hopes and fears ; for, on the events of a few days, will depend my future destiny.

LETTER XCIII.

The Same to the Same.

Sept. 3, 1797.

EARLY in the morning I attended Lord Denmore at breakfast: his countenance was gloomy, and his manner convinced me that his heart was labouring with a thousand conflicts. I was several times on the point of conjuring him to restore the packet; but the solemnity of his looks, and the depression of his voice, made my tongue falter. After many ineffectual efforts, I ventured to express my hopes that he had not destroyed the papers. "Destroyed them," repeated Lord Denmore; "not for the treasures of the universe! God forbid that I should be guilty of such sacrilege! They were the gift of a departed angel; and while I

am

am sensible of her injuries, of my own infernal——” Here he stopped abruptly; his lip became pale, and a tear gushed from his eye, which bespoke no trifling perturbation: then turning towards me, he clasped me to his heart with a degree of energy which made me tremble.”

“ Oh, Gertrude! were you but as innocent as when I first received you at the Castle.”

“ Do you doubt it, my Lord?” interrupted I: “ and can you hold me to your heart, supposing I am guilty?”

“ Somerton is a villain!” said Lord Denmore.

“ Feeble is that virtue which cannot baffle so avowed a libertine,” cried I, with a smile, which seemed to plead more forcibly than all the eloquence of language; for at that moment Lord Denmore’s countenance proclaimed my acquittal. He attempted to reply, but
could

could not: he pressed my hand to his lips; his tears fell on it.

"Say that you believe me," cried I, watching the emotions of his soul in his dark and penetrating eyes.

"I dare not," said he.

"Why, my Lord?"

"Because by your acquittal I shall criminate myself."

"I do not comprehend you."

"Have I not neglected you, Gertrude? Have I not deserted you in poverty, and exposed to every insult?"

"Think of it no more," said I.

"Have I not listened to every artful tale; to every specious calumny; encouraged even your enemies to slander you? Have I not attempted the life of the man you loved?"

"Never," said I.

"Not Edward Ashgrove's? Was he not the being of your choice?"

"Oh!

"Oh! never, never!" repeated I.

"Beware how you assert a falsehood," cried Lord Denmore: "the crisis approaches when we must close our long account of friendship; and if you attempt to deceive me, my hatred will be final."

"With such peril before me, can I dissimble?" said I.

"You ought not, when you reflect on what has passed," replied Lord Denmore; "and yet I know not how far you deserve my confidence. Appearances, Gertrude, have of late been strongly against you."

"I have been persecuted with a rigour unexampled," said I.

"We are all apt to place our indiscretions to the account of fortune," interrupted Lord Denmore; "but a little energy and much patience will always counteract the evils we complain of. You must understand me clearly," continued he: "I do not mean the enthusiasm

fiasm of romance; the energy I speak of is calm and determined; strong in perseverance, but temperate in action. It is the mild, yet steady lustre of the soul; not the fleeting corruscations of a vivid fancy." I listened attentively, but I made no reply. Lord Denmore, after a pause of some moments, again addressed me:

"You say that you have been unjustly persecuted; look round the world, and judge your own case by the sufferings of the million. In early youth it was your misfortune to lose your mother." Here his voice faltered; his countenance changed; while he inarticulately uttered, "But she is happy!"

My full heart sighed, but my tongue was silent.

"This is nothing to the purpose," continued Lord Denmore, "I have other business for this important hour: you are not sensible how much, even in
this

this world of selfish gratification, you stand indebted to a disinterested friend."

"Name the being who could be the friend of such an unhappy mortal," said I, "that I may thank him."

"Then hear me," interrupted Lord Denmore. "Convinced in my own mind that you were culpable, I had resolved on never beholding you again. The frequent repetition of crimes alleged against you, seemed to baffle every hope of reformation; and I had almost learnt to steel my heart against the touch of pity or esteem. In order to complete this task of resisting fortitude, for affection still lingered in my breast even while I sighed for your indiscretions, I resolved to marry."

I felt my colour change; and with a feeble voice requested him to proceed.

"I selected a woman, amiable and enlightened; one in whom I ventured to repose the secrets of my heart; even
the

the secret which you, till that period, alone participated."

"I do not understand you, my Lord."

"Ah, Gertrude! I told her how tenderly I loved you, till by your conduct you forfeited my fondness. I resolved in her society to seek that consolation which I had hoped to find in yours; for the ardent passions have been long subdued by the pangs of unrevealed affliction; and I am now only capable of feeling the more tranquil—more refined sensations of friendship and esteem." He paused, took several turns in the apartment, and then resuming his seat, after a few moments of recollection, continued:

"The day was fixed on for our marriage; the preliminaries of law were arranged; and I awaited the hour of my union with a composure of mind that evinced the total oblivion of those fervid hopes, those trembling fears, which
in

in early life so agitated my bosom. And yet, Gertrude, the object of my choice is lovely as woman need be; more fascinating than they ought to be; and far more deserving than, in these trifling times, they generally are."

"So I have heard, my Lord."

"At this momentous period, when all the sensitive fibres of my heart were armed against you; even when you gave yourself up to the weakness of despondency, an advocate stepped forth to plead your cause, and to demand your trial. That advocate, wonder while you hear it, was a woman."

"Blessings! a thousand blessings on her benignant heart!" said I.

"Nay, more; the woman who might, in twelve short hours, have been my wife."

"Miss Stanley?"

"Even she!" replied Lord Denmore; "the most generous, the most

liberal of women ! She who had resolution to refuse all that fortune, rank, and her own heart could promise, till she could again behold a forlorn, a deserted wanderer happy."

" O let me fly to her !" said I ; " let me pour forth the gratitude of my soul before this angelic woman."

" How shall I prove you worthy of her kindness ?"

" By suffering me to see her," said I, " for guilt would shrink before such unexampled goodness."

" Thou shalt see her, my Gertrude : thou shalt be the darling of her bosom. She, she shall be a mother to thee."

" Your wife, my Lord ?"

" Yes, Gertrude, *my* wife ; your second mother."

" My Lord !"

" Do you hesitate ?" interrupted my guardian ; " can you refuse to acknowledge such a woman ? One who has
sealed

sealed your pardon in my breast ; placed you again high in its esteem ; given you a new and powerful claim on its affections : can you hesitate to acknowledge such a mother ?”

“ My Lord, I will endeavour to subdue the feelings of my heart.”

“ She made no such effort,” cried Lord Denmore ; “ she acted from the impulse of boundless generosity ; and considered your happiness as its first and only object.” I was silent. After waiting for my answer several minutes, he again addressed me :

“ Have I convinced you that there still exists virtue and feeling in the human breast, merely to teach you how to be ungrateful ?”

“ Heaven forbid !” said I.

“ Then be the convert of sensibility : feel as you ought ; and let her find you all she believes you to be : for there is no chagrin more poignant than that

which a generous mind experiences, on finding those objects whom it most loved, the most unworthy. Come and witness an union, which, being formed on the basis of esteem, will, I trust, be productive of the mild felicities." The servant now informed Lord Denmore that the carriage was waiting; and, in a few minutes, we proceeded on our journey.

LETTER XCIV.

The Same to the Same.

Sept. 5, 1797.

As soon as we quitted Cheltenham, Lord Denmore resumed the conversation. "Do not imagine, Gertrude," said he, "that I should have pardoned
you,

you, or acquitted your conduct, after finding you under the roof of Mr. Somerton, had I not been fully informed, by Mrs. Walters, of the manner of your arrival. The knowledge I obtained of your being there, came from Lady Arcot; to whose house I repaired on receiving a letter from her Ladyship, informing me that you were her prisoner. Every feeling of my heart was awakened by this intelligence. I knew the profligacy of Lord Arcot's character; the malevolence of his wife's; and fearing that both your reputation and your sensibility might suffer under their protection, I resolved to inform Miss Stanley of your danger."

I sighed.

"Her commands determined me to snatch you from impending ruin."

I raised my eyes involuntarily towards heaven.

“ I read the meaning of that look,” said Lord Denmore ; “ you would rather be obliged to your own power over my affections, than to the interference of a third person. This is a false pride. I never should, self-actuated, have flown to succour you ; for it has been my task, during many months, a painful task, to arm my breast against every thing like compassion for your sorrows.”

“ What crime, my Lord, have I been guilty of ?” said I.

“ Ingratitude,” replied Lord Denmore, sternly.

“ Towards whom, my Lord ?”

“ Towards the only friend you had in the universe,” answered my guardian ; “ One who, when all the breathing race deserted you, protected, loved, served, and defended you.”

“ Yourself, my Lord ?”

“ I do

“ I do not merit that reproach,” said Lord Denmore ; “ though I feel it but too acutely. No, Gertrude ! I was not one of those, whose philanthropic minds examine before they condemn the unhappy. I listened to every tale that calumny invented ; and I believed them all. From the hour of Lady Denmore’s elopement, my affection weakened ; my prejudice grew strong ; my pride rose high above my judgment ; and, my own wrongs absorbing every source of feeling in my heart, I never suffered reason to suggest the anguish I was cherishing for yours. Had not this blind credulity rendered me deaf to all the pleadings of humanity, of justice, and affection, I had never thought of marrying Miss Stanley. To you, Gertrude ! my days should have been devoted ; exclusively devoted.”

“ To me, my Lord !” said I, while my heart fluttered between the contending emotions of memory and regret.

“ Yes, Gertrude ! to you,” continued Lord Denmore : “ from your earliest infancy I had loved you beyond all other existing beings : your endearing qualities, your personal and mental graces, all conspired to charm my senses, and ratify my hopes. Long did my expectant heart throb for that period, when I should call you by the tenderest name ; present you to the world, the pride of my bosom, the ornament of my family ; and lighten my mind of that painful load which had depressed its faculties, and poisoned its felicity : but alas !”—He paused.

“ Proceed, my Lord !” said I hastily ; “ I am strong in fortitude, and can hear whatever you may think fit to utter.”

He pressed my hand, and continued : “ On your arrival at Denmore Castle, all the resolution of my soul was summoned to meet you. During several days preceding that event my spirits
were

were depressed, my hopes elated, my fears——”

“Your fears, my Lord! of what?”

“There lies the mystery,” replied Lord Denmore: “I dreaded to behold you, what you were: and while I gazed on your form, your features, your smile, your timid blush, your eyes beaming with gratitude through tears, I trembled; I was alarmed: but when I heard your voice, I was completely vanquished.” Lord Denmore folded his hands before his eyes, and seemed agitated beyond the power of concealment. I conjured him to be tranquil.

“Would to Heaven I could!” answered he faintly: “but my soul is too sensibly organized ever to be tranquil, till memory subsides, or is eternally obliterated.”

“I entreat you to be explicit, my Lord!” said I. “There is something so ambiguous in your words and manner,

that I am anxious for an explanation. There can be no event, concerning myself, to which I ought to be a stranger."

"The period is not yet arrived," said Lord Denmore, sighing deeply. "At your birth it was the wish of both your parents that you should remain in ignorance of your expectations till you attained your twenty-first year. There is but one mortal breathing, excepting those to whom you owe existence, who knows the secret."

"May I ask in whose breast the important mystery was confided?"

"In his, whose mind I once considered as the source of every virtue: in whom I placed the most unbounded faith: whose plausible and subtle nature so won upon my esteem, that I would have trusted him with my life; nay, more, my honour. In a moment of sacred confidence I told him all. From that hour he assumed a manner which taught
me

me to feel my own folly and his unworthiness. By progressive steps he undermined my happiness; made himself master of my actions; and, to complete the climax of his subtle machinations, accomplished my wife's dishonour."

"Mr. Treville!" said I, trembling.

"The infamous Treville! the abandoned Somerton!" replied Lord Denmore: "he knows the whole of your eventful history; and to my rash credulity you may attribute his incessant persecutions."

"Is my story of so humiliating a nature," said I, "that it should expose me to the shame of personal degradation? Am I, as the daughter of Major St. Leger, less exempt from insult than I should be as the ward of Lord Denmore?"

"You do not comprehend me," replied my guardian; "there are temptations, which to some minds outbalance

those of personal or mental worth ; for to the groveling and worldly-minded, the possession of fortune's favours will preponderate in the scale of attraction, even though the most unbounded treasures of nature are placed in competition."

" Of fortune's favours !" repeated I : " alas ! my Lord, you bewilder, you distract me ! Am I not an orphan ; poor, deserted, and dependent on your bounty ?"

" Ask me no farther questions," said Lord Denmore sternly ; " I will not answer them : I have been once the fool of my own candour. A short time will authorize me to be more explicit : have patience, and await the period tranquilly."

" Impossible ! my Lord."

" Then till the hour approaches we must separate," replied my guardian.

" Heaven forbid !" exclaimed I, bursting into tears.

" Then

“Then promise not to question me.”

“My Lord! I will be silent,” answered I, “whatever agony I may suffer. Yet let me hope that you will allow me to call you guardian; to claim your esteem, your friendship, and protection.”

“Your claim to each, Gertrude, is indisputable,” said Lord Denmore: “I could not, even were I so inclined, refuse you either. Dear to me from your infancy, I am not so worldly a being, that I can abjure a sentiment, by hope and habit rendered congenial to my nature. If I have for a time estranged you from my heart, the pain, the penance, was on my side; for, if there be honour in man, or faith in his asseverations, even amidst the pleasures of existence, the allurements of ambition, and the busy occupations of society, your image has been present to my scattered senses; and while I was superficially

happy, my soul mourned in silence for your absence."

I ventured to look earnestly at him; his countenance was thoughtful even to sadness; his arms were folded, and his dark brows seemed to overshadow those eyes which were expressive of his mind's sombre ruminations. Ah, Frances! he recalled to memory the moment of my arrival at Denmore Castle; that moment which set the seal upon my future destiny, by confirming the sovereignty of his dominion over my senses.

Little more was said, and nothing on the same subject, till we arrived in Portman Square, where I now bid you, dearest Frances, farewell.

LETTER XCV.

The Same to the Same.

Sept. 7, 1797.

ON Lord Denmore's entering the house, he immediately requested that I would excuse his leaving me for a short time, he having business of the utmost importance to transact during his stay in London. My mind, which was wearied by contending emotions, readily acquiesced in his wish, with the idea, that the power to indulge my solitary ruminations might in some degree soften the acute sensibility of my heart.

I was left alone in the drawing-room, which I found completely metamorphosed since I had last seen it. Not a single object remained that could remind
me

me of the departed Lady Denmore, excepting her portrait, which seemed to smile on me. I fixed my eyes upon the features, while the tear of regret, which her memory extorted, dimmed my sight, till I turned from it. "Ah!" thought I, "could the inanimate resemblance suddenly possess the power of feeling, how would that bosom ache to know that its sorrows are so soon forgotten! How would the indignant brow frown on the gay scenes which shortly will proclaim, that thou art no more remembered! I again looked earnestly at the picture; the lip was ruddy, the eye's lustre seemed to sparkle on the canvass; the breast to heave; the cheek to glow with eloquent and vivid animation. Fancy then turned to the dark grave where every beauty perished: I shuddered: I felt the blood curdle in my breast. How weak, how imbecile was the emotion! How much to be envied was the mouldering Lady, Denmore,

Denmore, when reflection paused on the situation of your friend !

I now rang the bell, with an intention to inquire the particulars of my guardian's approaching marriage : but before the servant could enter the room, the vigilant reprover, Conscience, told me I was wrong. The idea of prying into the secrets of domestic life, through the weakness or treachery of others, made my cheek redden ; and I felicitated my heart on its sudden escape from the most degrading species of curiosity, while I inquired, with a faltering voice, after my old friend Mrs. Sewell.

To my extreme regret the servant informed me, that she had, by incessant attention to the Duchess of Aldborough during her illness, so destroyed her own health, that she only a few months survived her. My chagrin was infinite ; for I longed eagerly to see her, and to convince

vince her how zealously I wished to repay her past attentions.

Lord Denmore returned late : we dined alone. As soon as the dessert was placed on the table, with an embarrassment of tone and manner, he addressed me : “ Gertrude,” said he, “ I have something to mention, which I trust will meet with your approbation. It has long been my desire to see you happy.” I bowed my acknowledgments : he continued—“ Your merit, your accomplishments, deserve that reward which only can be found in pure and social scenes, where rational delight is sanctioned by mutual and warm affections. Nay, blush not,” said he, remarking the suffusion on my cheek ; “ to love is honourable where the object is worthy of being beloved. It is only a misplaced and degrading passion, which fills the mind with shame, the heart with sorrow. Answer

swer me, is not your bosom strongly interested in favour of one, who dares not solicit, because he fears to be denied?" I felt my heart throb as though it would burst from its concealment; while my countenance betrayed such hopes and fears, as common natures are incapable of feeling.

"I see you are perplexed and agitated," returned Lord Denmore: "I would cease to urge an answer, did I not believe that the result of my question would be productive of felicity. Tell me therefore briefly, and let your candour be equal to your judgment, lives there not a man, whose worth has placed him high in your esteem, who has proved his integrity, and who merits some reward for his attachment?"

"My Lord, your question—" I could not proceed.—He took my hand, and pressing it to his lips: "Is unanswerable,"

able," said he, smiling : " such language I should have expected from a less ingenuous bosom. It is the privilege of beauty to be undecided, trifling, and capricious : but where sense has harmonized the charm of personal attraction, I should have hoped for something more like candour." I withdrew my hand, and placing it before my eyes, sighed deeply.

" Indeed, my Lord, I know not how to answer you," said I.

" Then I will instruct you, Gertrude," interrupted Lord Denmore. " Throw aside the little empty scruples which degrade your sex ; disdain to cherish that false delicacy, that fastidious pride, which too often forbids the heart to own its proudest feelings ; collect your thoughts, and answer me with frankness : Have you not smothered in your bosom a concealed attachment ; fearful that, while
your

your fate was enveloped in mystery, a precipitate choice might be productive of future regret?" I made no reply.

"Still you are silent!" continued Lord Denmore. "Reflect, I conjure you, before you compel me decidedly to condemn you."

"My Lord, I am unprepared for such a question: in a few days I will answer it."

"Promise that you will not again protract the period," said Lord Denmore.

"I will endeavour to be explicit."

"The energies of truth depend upon ourselves," replied my guardian; "and a little exertion will never fail to awaken the warm and liberal glow of an ingenuous nature. On the question of this moment more depends than you are aware of. I am strongly, earnestly interested in your decision: it will either confirm

confirm my fears, or take from my mind an infinity of apprehension."

"Of what, my Lord?" said I hastily.

"Of a circumstance which would hurry me to madness; though, being accessory to it, I should deserve no pity."

Lord Denmore now started from his seat, and walking hastily about the room, seemed violently agitated; my heart caught the contagious irritation, and ached with the burden that oppressed it. At one moment I was on the point of confessing all I felt and all I had long suffered: I could have poured forth the anguish of my soul, have fallen at his feet, and owned myself the idolater of his virtues; but that petrifying fiend, called Custom, checked the impulse, and conjured up a thousand spells to hold my tongue in silence, and to prevent its uttering that which my heart would willingly have prompted.

"A few

“A few days,” said Lord Denmore, interrupting my reverie, “a very few days, Gertrude, will decide your fate, and *mine*.”

“Yours! How is that possible?” cried I.

“Nay, it is unquestionable,” replied my guardian.—“The period is now approaching, when we must be better known, or separated eternally. It would be the extent of criminality to trifle with your feelings, or to conceal my own: therefore reflect; and, if you value my affection, if you wish not to embitter all my days with the pang of disappointment, you will be explicit.” As he uttered these words, he quitted the room, and I passed the remainder of the evening in a series of gloomy meditations.

I retired early to my chamber: the night produced but little repose, and in the morning I awoke, feverish and depressed. On meeting Lord Denmore at breakfast,

breakfast, I observed him more than usually calm ; his manner softened, and his countenance expressive of feelings at once determined and benignant. He had passed two hours, previous to my seeing him, with his solicitor ; and his mind was evidently absorbed by business of importance.

As soon as breakfast was over, my guardian informed me that it was his intention immediately to set out for Denmore Castle : “ We will talk on the business which I mentioned last night, as we proceed on our journey,” said he placidly : “ your spirits seem oppressed, and you are, to all appearance, ill prepared for such a conversation ; but events crowd so rapidly on each other, and all of such important tendency, that there is no time to lose.” A servant now entered the room, to say that the chaise was ready ; and Lord Denmore, taking my hand, led me to the door, from whence

whence we immediately set off, without uttering another syllable.

Frances, does not your sympathetic bosom feel more than common solicitude while you read this letter? Does not the genuine sensibility of your heart bid it tremble, while a friend, most dear, most valued, approaches the tribunal where her destiny will be decided? I feel the sensitive monitor, whose dictates I have ever followed, shrink at the trial; while the unerring voice of nature whispers, that it will soon terminate. How dull, how uninteresting, is every scene before me, in which Lord Denmore is not the object of attraction! How weary are my senses of those delusive dreams, which lull me for a time, only to arm my resisting faculties against accumulating sorrows.

I feel my health decaying, my fortitude exhausted; I am so wearied with perpetual anxiety, that I am almost beyond
the

the power of enjoying happiness. Despair, when it becomes familiar with the mind, admits no palliating rival; it riots with a despotic sway over the wretch whom it has subdued, nor leaves its victim till the last groan of death closes its scene of triumph.

I will write again to-morrow.

Adieu.

·LETTER XCVI.

The Same to the Same.

September 8, 1797.

ON our arrival at the Castle, I observed every apartment newly and splendidly embellished, excepting the library; and even there it was in vain that I looked for those objects in which, at former periods, I had found consolation. The bust

of Lord Denmore, and its companion, the head of Sappho, were removed ; in their places, vases of china, filled with flowers, displayed a gaudy and unmeaning decoration, strikingly contrasting the sober and correct taste which I had before contemplated. I could not suppress a sigh when I first observed the alteration ; and I resolved, as soon as opportunity permitted, to make every inquiry after my discarded favourites.

A moment convenient for my purpose soon presented itself, by a female servant's entering the room, to inquire in which apartment I would choose to sleep.

" In that to which I am accustomed," said I carelessly ; " or in any other that is prepared for me."

" There is none prepared, Ma'am," said the servant ; " for we did not expect my Lord so soon : the last message from town informed us, that his Lordship

would not be at the Castle till after the wedding."

"Was the event expected to take place so speedily?" said I.

"We have waited hourly for orders to have the Castle ready for our new Lady," answered the girl; "and when you stopped at the portico, we concluded that my Lord was married; for the intended bride is said to be very young, and very handsome."

"Shew me my chamber," said I, embarrassed by her conversation: "I wish to change my dress, before I meet Lord Denmore at dinner."

"Shall I assist you, Ma'am?" said the servant, smiling and curtsying respectfully. "I shall be proud to serve you; for I have often heard Mrs. Walters, our late housekeeper, talk of Miss Gertrude; and she said it was a pleasure to wait upon you, you were so good-natured."

"Indeed,

“ Indeed, I did not know I had so kind a friend,” said I sighing.

“ Oh, ma’am ! you must not judge of every body by my Lord’s behaviour,” interrupted the simple girl : “ his conduct towards you has got him many an ill word, I promise you ; for all the country round thought, when my Lord became a widower, that you would have been my Lady ; and ’tis much if some of the family don’t owe somebody a grudge, for taking a place that does not belong to her.”

“ Heaven forbid !” said I. “ Lord Denmore has a right to act as he thinks proper.”

“ No matter for that,” replied the girl ; “ he has behaved very improperly in making the world believe one thing, and then doing another. Such ways would be scouted among poorer folks : and though I am only Patty the chambermaid, and a labouring man’s daughter, I

would not have such a false-hearted husband, though he were worth his weight in gold."

"Who told you he was false-hearted?" said I.

"Why all the village up at Denmore, and the parson's wife, Madam Pew, into the bargain, she said that my master ought to be ashamed of himself, because he was a Lord."

I could not help smiling.—"Why because he was a Lord?" said I.

"One expects more from great people, you know, Ma'am, than one does from common folks; and, truth can tell, we are often sadly disappointed!"

"Too often, indeed, Patty," said I. "But I wish to dress for dinner." She led the way, without making any answer, and I followed.

On entering my chamber where I had always slept, when at the Castle, the first objects that met my eyes were the
busts

busts which had been removed from the library. I started at seeing them; but my surprise was instantly succeeded by a secret satisfaction, and I stood contemplating them for several minutes with a melancholy pleasure. Patty, who could not account for my evident fascination, reminded me that it was late, and that Lord Denmore would expect me:—I made no reply; my soul was absorbed by the object before me;—and, at that moment, the bust of my guardian seemed the treasure of my heart, adored and valued beyond all others.

My feet seemed rooted to the spot where I stood, till I heard the bell ring for dinner; I started from my reverie, and making a short toilette, hastened to the saloon: I found my guardian alone. As I took my seat at the table, “This, my dearest Gertrude, will be our last dinner *tête-a-tête*, at least for some time,”

said

said he ; “ I have requested a few friends to meet you, and they will soon be here.” I faintly thanked him, and the next half hour passed on, almost in silence.

Immediately after dinner Lord Denmore proposed an evening walk : the weather was temperate, and the sky unclouded. As we descended the steps of the portico, taking my arm and placing it within his, he thus addressed me.

“ Gertrude, are you inclined to marry? and will you take an husband of my choosing? I have selected one, who loves you, as you deserve to be beloved; one whom, if I am a just observer of the human heart, you have often looked upon with more than ordinary attention. He has watched your footsteps, he has been your guardian, your protector.”

“ Whom do you mean, my Lord?” said I, reddening, and confused.

“ Suppose

“ Suppose I should be mistaken.—
How shall I recompense his heart for
the disappointment it will suffer?”

“ Does he feel so confident, so well
assured of my compliance?” said I.

“ Love is a flattering tyrant;” answered Lord Denmore. “ He will not
yield where there is a gleam of hope to
sustain him.”

“ Have I bid him hope, my Lord?”

“ I have every reason to believe so,”
replied my guardian.

“ On what authority?”

“ The evidence of truth; the test of
sensibility;—the claims of gratitude.”

“ I can neither be ungrateful, nor
unjust, my Lord; and if there be on
earth a mortal who has such a right to
my affections, I am ready to bestow
them.”

“ To-morrow he shall make his
claim, then,” interrupted Lord Den-
more.—I knew not what to say. The

varying thoughts that rapidly succeeded each other, entirely absorbed my mind, and we walked silently and slowly on, till we reached the ivy grotto.—The rushing sound of the water beneath the root-bridge roused me to recollection; while I gazed intently on the wild brook, and my heart fluttered at the retrospect which memory presented. My guardian observed my fixed attention, and guessed the cause.

“Fortunate was the moment when I first beheld you at this solitary spot,” said he: “I have never thought of it without experiencing a mixture of pain and pleasure that is indescribable.”

“Whether your interference was fortunate or not, my Lord, time only can develope,” said I; “for it must be but a mournful source of reflection to a feeling mind, that a being was preserved from death, only to endure a life of anguish.”

“We

“ We will return to the wood,” said Lord Denmore ; “ this melancholy nook seems to inspire you with a propensity to sadness. Here you never will find repose.”

“ I think I shall, my Lord,” said I, with an impressive energy, which startled him.

“ What ! in this solitary gloomy grotto, beside this noisy restless brook ? Impossible !”

“ Ah ! my Lord, I see that, with all your knowledge of mankind, your boasted philosophy, your intercourse with society, you are still a stranger to the strong magic of habitual thought over the human mind ; you are still to learn, that when once the brain adopts a favourite source of rumination, it feeds upon it till it can endure no other spring of action.”

“ I do not comprehend you !” said my guardian.

“ That knowledge is to come, my Lord,” said I.

Again the time was passed in thought, till we returned to the Castle, where I employ the hours till supper in finishing this letter.

The next that you receive *will be decisive.*

Frances, farewell ! If the long account of my disastrous life should soon be closed, I bequeath to your friendship the melancholy record : and I charge you, by all the transcendent virtues of your heart, to extort a sigh of compunction from those hard bosoms which have throbbed with triumph at my unmerited misfortunes.

LETTER XCVII.

The Same to the Same:

Sept. 10, 1797.

AT day-break I resume my pen, with an heart aching to the centre, and with eyes drowned in tears, which flow incessantly. A new source of anguish has unfolded itself; and I am overwhelmed even to distraction.

Lord Denmore refuses to see me. He confines himself wholly to the library; he excused himself from meeting me at supper by a brief note, in which he informed me, that for reasons of the most delicate and important nature, he cannot hold any further conversation with me till he receives my answer finally and unequivocally.

What can he mean by such extraordinary conduct? But this is not the subject of my letter: I have a still more painful and more interesting event to communicate. I am destined to be the self-acting poison of my own repose. I am the most unfortunate of mortals.

On receiving Lord Denmore's excuses, I resolved to remain in my chamber till I retired to rest. Fatigued by the labour of conjecture; and by turns elated by hope, or depressed by apprehension, I scarcely knew how time passed till the Castle clock struck eleven. I had paced to and fro in my chamber, indulging my soul in gloomy fancies, and at times gazing intently on the bust of my dear, my unkind guardian. Soothing, though melancholy was the occupation, I often knelt before it, pressed the cold marble to my burning lips, bathed it with tears, and talked to it in the wild and incoherent language of a maniac. The features,
strongly

strongly chisselled, and rendered doubly stern for want of those tints which harmonize the human countenance, seemed to frown upon me. The eyes, with vacant horror fixed in a cold and ghastly sameness, reminded me of death. I felt their fascinating influence, with all their attendant horrors: I had scarcely power to breathe; and to move from the place where I then stood, seemed almost a painful effort. Thus I continued to indulge in the most mournful meditations, till my courage began to fail, and I became afraid even to look on the inanimate object before me. It was so placed as to meet my eye in every direction. I knew that it would be the last thing I should see before I slept, and the first that I should behold on waking. This idea determined me on removing it to an adjoining dressing-room. With trembling hands I raised the bust, whose
weight

weight nearly overpowered my strength; and was preparing to carry it, when my arm touched the head of Sappho, which fell to the ground, shattered into a thousand pieces.

My consternation may be easily imagined. I knew that the bust was much valued by Lord Denmore; and that his regret for the accident would be infinite. With some difficulty I replaced the likeness of my guardian where I had found it; and collecting the fragments which lay scattered round me, sighed over them with sorrow and vexation.

The fluttering of my heart would scarcely permit me to settle my mind to any species of reflection during the remainder of the night; and I traversed my chamber till near day-break; I then commenced this short letter, which I will not conclude till more has transpired respecting my destiny.

I again

Evening.

I again take up my pen. I have not yet seen Lord Denmore : but I have been kindly, affectionately received by the good Rector and his excellent wife. They embraced me with a fervency of friendship, which proved their liberal and philanthropic natures. So virtuous, so excellent a pair do honour to humanity ; and when placed in the scale with the generality of mankind, by the magnitude of their worth, seem to compensate for the vices and follies of the world they embellish.

I passed more than an hour in their society. How soothing were the greetings of such benignant beings ! How mild, how consoling was the language of reason falling from lips that were unacquainted with falsehood.

Mrs. Pew shed tears of joy, while the Rector pressed my hand, and blessed
Heaven

Heaven that he was once more permitted to see me. "We have talked of you many a long evening," said he, sighing; "and as the sun went down, and the beauties of nature seemed to smile around us, we have thought of your sorrows, and prayed for their termination." I thanked them by looks, for words were suppressed by the contending claims of gratitude and friendship.

"I congratulate you, my love!" said Mrs. Pew, "on the good fortune which at last awaits you. The approaching change is no secret in the neighbourhood of the Castle."

"To what do you allude?" said I, gravely.

"To your marriage," replied Mrs. Pew. "My Lord, who is all goodness and condescension, has made no scruple to avow his intentions."

"Of what?" interrupted I.

"Of marrying you," replied Mrs. Pew.

"To

“ To whom ?” said I earnestly, and with evident trepidation.

“ Why, to whom can it be but to himself ?” cried Mrs. Pew, smiling. “ His Lordship consulted with my husband on the subject, and told him without reserve, that he thought you would at last do honour to his family.”

“ Ah ! my kind friends,” said I, taking both their hands and kissing them ; “ I fear that Lord Denmore spoke ambiguously on the subject ; because I have been informed that he has chosen a woman for his wife, whose fortune and ennobled connections entitle her to share the rank he holds in society.”

“ You amaze me !” cried Mrs. Pew, with evident astonishment. “ Is it possible that a nobleman of Lord Denmore’s exalted mind can stoop to such hypocrisy ?”

“ Indeed, my love, you are mistaken,” interrupted the Rector : “ my Lord assured

assured me that Miss St. Leger was the first object in his affections."

"Then I believe it," said Mrs. Pew; "for my Lord would get nothing by deceiving us. Not that I suppose his Lordship would assert a falsehood to be the possessor of an empire: he knows too well what belongs to nobility." The Rector shook his head and smiled.

"Lord Denmore is but a mortal!" said he: "and you may depend upon it he knows that the union will be productive of felicity, or he would never think of forming it. He said that our sweet girl was entitled to his affections; that he would shortly prove her right, and his sense of her superior virtues. He also added, that it depended on herself alone, whether or not she would be the happiest of women."

My heart beat high with hope; but many doubts and fears still struggled round it. The conversation which I had

on

on the preceding day with Lord Denmore, at one moment confirmed Mrs. Pew's opinion; and the next, the singularity of his present conduct completed my despair. The hour growing late, I took my leave, promising to repeat my visit at the Parsonage in the course of a day or two.

I returned to the Castle. On entering the hall, I observed Lord Denmore suddenly rush into the library, and shut the door. I hastened to my chamber, where I found Patty, of whom I inquired whether any one had arrived during my absence. She informed me, with brief simplicity, that, by the housekeeper's orders, she had prepared one of the best chambers; but for whom she could not tell. I felt my cheek turn cold, as though the blood forsook it. The girl remarked my change of countenance; and expressed her fears that she had said something to alarm me: "I thought you knew,

knew, Ma'am," said she, "that my Lord's new Lady was hourly looked for at the Castle; and it is ten to one but she is the person coming."

"Most probably!" cried I, with a voice scarcely audible.

"I'm sure," added Patty, "my Lord is in a fine humour to receive his bride; for he has been moping and sighing all the day, to my knowledge: now in one place, and then in another; and never pleased any where. My new Lady is likely to have a blessed time of it with such a husband. But there are more quality coming; my Lord and my Lady Melcomb; and it is odds but my new Lady will find amusement with some of 'em. 'Tis no wonder that my Lord's first wife went off in a huff; for I have often heard that he was as glum as a bear after you came to the Castle.

"After I came," repeated I, angrily: "what do you mean, child?"

"Nothing,

“ Nothing, Ma’am,” replied Patty; “ only this I will say, when some folks talk of other folks all day and all night, there is reason to speak, and to wonder too. Why, it was only this morning, as I was sweeping the library, I found a little red leather case; and thinking it no great harm to take a peep, I opened it.”

“ Well!” interrupted I.

“ And so,” added Patty, “ what should I see but a picture as like you as it could stare; and on the opposite side, in the case, was hair all wove, and placed under a glass; and on it was—”

“ What?” said I, eagerly.

“ Why, a G, and an S: and I knew directly whose name begins with those letters.”

“ Heavens! is it possible?” said I.

“ ’Tis as true as I am living,” replied Patty: “ but while I was looking at it, I heard my Lord coming; and so, afraid
that

that I should get anger for my curiosity, I pops it into my pocket."

"O let me see it!" said I.

"That's more than I am able," replied Patty; "for after I had got out of the library, I began to think on what I had done; and supposing that I should be looked upon as no better than a thief if the picture was found in my possession; and knowing that a bit of painted ivory was of no great value, I thought the best way of saving myself from blame was to throw it into the brook, near the root-bridge: so away went I, and down went the picture, case and all, quite to the bottom."

I stood mute with consternation. A portrait of myself, with the initials of my name! what could it mean? The singularity of this circumstance has, from the moment of Patty's relating it, possessed my mind; and I am determined, at day-break, to visit the brook, in hopes that

at least some fragment may remain to corroborate her story. Ah, Frances ! how eagerly does hope rest on even the shadow of consolation ! How slender is the thread on which the happiness or misery of a lover hangs, when doubt and fear are destined to command it !

You shall hear from me again tomorrow ! This expected guest ! O, my friend ! if it be Miss Stanley !

My heart shrinks, my pen falls.—
Frances, adieu.

LETTER XCVIII.

The Same to the Same.

Sept. 14, 1797.

AT the first glimpse of morning, I arose from my pillow ; and hastily dressing myself, repaired to the root-bridge. The
mists

mists yet floated over the landscape, and the ground was woven over with goffamer, while the sun-beams began to gild the turrets of the Castle. The harmony which seemed to characterize every inanimate object that met my eyes, only served, by contrast, to deepen the colour of my destiny. I knew not why, but as I approached the side of the brook, my bosom thrilled with a freezing sensation, which almost made my fortitude sicken: but on fixing my gaze intently on the stream, through its shallow, un-sullied waters, I perceived the red leather case, perfectly visible. I knelt on the margin; and plunging my arm into the brook, after several unsuccessful efforts, at length had the good fortune to recover it. I opened it eagerly; but alas! Frances, the colours were entirely effaced: the ivory bore not the faintest mark of any thing like a portrait; though the hair was unhurt, and the cypher, which

was

was of gold fillagree, as perfect as when it was placed there by the artisan.

I was as much at a loss as ever respecting the picture, which Patty had assured me so strongly resembled myself. The confidence she had placed in me, and the full conviction that her fault was the effect of ignorance or simplicity, prevented the possibility of my making inquiries which might satisfy my mind upon the subject. I continued to walk slowly through the wood, contemplating the cypher, and bewildering my thoughts in the mazes of conjecture; when, on turning a dark angle, I met Lord Denmore.

My confusion was such as nearly overpowered me. I had not presence of mind to conceal the case; but losing all recollection, stood mute, and covered with blushes. His eyes instantaneously fastened on what he thought his valued

treasure. "Gertrude!" said he, "where did you find that portrait?"

"Portrait, my Lord!" repeated I, hesitating and perplexed.

"Yes, Gertrude! the portrait of—"

"Whom, my Lord?" interrupted I, with a degree of emotion which he could not but observe.

"The portrait of—your mother!"

I sunk into his arms, and all objects grew dim before me. The woods seemed lost in black and oblivious mists; and even the form of Lord Denmore, which I ever believed would be present to my mind as long as my bosom throbbed with vitality, was no longer visible. Yet, Frances, I heard him, though indistinctly, uttering the regret, the agonizing regret, which his heart suffered, as he contemplated the uncoloured ivory. After several minutes of little less than total stagnation, my pulses again beat

5

quickly;

quickly ; and remembrance imprinted on my brain, in characters indelible, the magnitude of my misfortune.

The portrait of my mother ! Oh, Frances ! had it pleased Heaven to have left me this one source of consolation, my destiny had yet been ameliorated ; I had still been permitted to contemplate the semblance of that celestial spirit, which so early quitted this probationary scene, leaving her ill-fated orphan to struggle with the world's unkindness ! But even that hope was never to be mine ; I was not born to know even the delusive joy which springs from visionary blessings.

As soon as I had sufficiently recovered strength to walk, Lord Denmore, taking my arm, led me towards the Castle. Twice he looked intently at me, but the distress which my countenance exhibited prevented his questioning me farther on the subject. On our reaching the por-

tico, I observed a chaise and four advancing along the park : I looked first towards this new object of solicitude, and next at Lord Denmore. His colour changed : he hastily conducted me to the library ; his hand shook as though it had been palsied ; while he in a low voice articulated, " The hour of trial is arrived, exert your fortitude !" I sunk into a chair near the balcony, and watched the chaise till it stopped at the portico."

The stranger was Lady Upas. I arose instantly, and flew to meet her ; I embraced her with a degree of joy which my heart had almost forgotten. We returned to the library ; my guardian did not follow us. My kind, my amiable friend, from whom I had been so long separated, expressed her pleasure at seeing me once more under the protection of Lord Denmore. At this moment he entered the room :

" Gertrude,"

“ Gertrude,” said he, with a voice evidently interrupted by doubts and fears, “ this meeting must be no less pleasant to yourself than to your friend Miss Stanley !” I started, and turned aside to conceal the sudden shock my senses received, at the moment when they seemed to escape from the chain of persecutions which oppressed them. I had not power to speak ; my lip quivered, and my head was bowed with shame and disappointment ; for at that moment I reproached myself for the apparent ingratitude of my conduct ; I recollected all that Lord Denmore had told me respecting Miss Stanley’s disinterested generosity, and I considered myself as the most worthless of mortals.

Immediately after breakfast my guardian and Miss Stanley proposed walking ; I made my excuses, and in my solitary chamber indulged in the very excess of sorrow. I had to behold, in the bride of

Lord Denmore, the only woman upon earth to whom I owed unbounded obligations. Reason, gratitude, and feeling forbade that I should attempt to interrupt their union; and yet I knew that the hand which gave a wife to Lord Denmore would inevitably seal my fate for ever.

From my window I observed them walking in earnest conversation: Miss Stanley seemed to be speaking with energy, my guardian listening attentively. I saw him frequently press his forehead with his hand, as was his usual custom when his mind was agitated. I was little less than frantic. The wild emotions of a soul, labouring with the tortures of hopeless but incurable affection; the pang of disappointed pride, the misery of conscious error, the burning blush of shame, and the anguish of dependence, conspired against my reason, and nearly vanquished it.

Frances,

Frances, at that moment—I tremble while I confess the thought—at that dreadful moment, I meditated self-destruction! the next, I resolved to dash my burning aching bosom amidst the roaring waters which had once, but for the interposition of Lord Denmore, eternally engulfed me. Full of my desperate purpose, I rushed forth from my chamber, talking madly to myself, and exclaiming, “I will terminate this scene of torture—I will *perish*!”

As I pronounced these words I felt a female’s arms encircling me, and heard the voice of poor Patty conjuring me to be patient. It was in vain that she exerted all her power to hold me; I felt as though I possessed a lion’s strength, and tearing myself from her, hastened to the brook: Patty followed me with equal swiftness, and by screaming as she pursued me, attracted the attention of Lord Denmore. Bewildered, wild, and frantic,

again I turned towards the Castle; the towers seemed to tremble as if an earthquake shook them: the sky was black and stormy. My brain was burning, and my lips were parched; I felt the maniac's fever scorching up the withering fibres of my heart, and I raved distractedly.

Before I reached the portico, Miss Stanley overtook me: she snatched my arm, and held me till my guardian assisted her in leading me to the library. I laughed convulsively. Oh, Frances! Lord Denmore knelt before me in tears; even his stern, his philosophic bosom, was melted and subdued.

"Leave us together, my Lord," said Miss Stanley; "I have something of importance to say, that will soothe this dear suffering girl." My guardian obeyed.

"My fears are confirmed," said she; "you love Lord Denmore, Gertrude; and

and Heaven forbid that I should be his wife! From this hour I am determined to resign him." I listened, and my fleeting spirit seemed to awake as from a dream; but the conflict had been too severe for my exhausted senses, and I was beyond the power of thanking her. She assisted me in returning to my chamber. My fever was violent; I was conveyed to my bed, where I have been ever since confined, and, if I may judge from the countenances of those who attend me, in extreme danger.

At short intervals I have written this letter. Miss Stanley has been my constant companion; the rector and his excellent wife have visited me daily; they have bent their heads in sorrow over my pillow, and bathed it with their tears: I have not seen Lord Denmore; he secludes himself entirely in his study.

I close my letter, for I am faint and exhausted.

LETTER XCIX.

Miss STANLEY to FRANCES MONT-
GOMERY.

Sept. 16, 1797.

THE task which I now undertake, though prompted by friendship, is attended with considerable regret: it will sufficiently alarm your feelings to know that Miss St. Leger's situation requires an amanuensis; I shall therefore, without farther prelude, unfold the purpose of my letter, which is merely that of commencing a correspondence.

I am informed by the invalid, for you already know that she has been some time confined to her chamber, that an unceasing and confidential intercourse has passed between you, ever since the period
of

of her quitting Ireland. Assured of this circumstance, I may more freely expatiate on present events, and with less reserve describe the anticipated prospect, than I should be authorised to do, under limits more contracted.

Gertrude has been the most unfortunate and persecuted of women: she has been at once the dupe of the unworthy, the ornament of society, and the slave of sensibility. Educated in total seclusion from the world, she was the pupil of precept; but she was soon taught to know, that a liberal and feeling heart had many pangs to encounter, before it could become the convert of practice. She entered the vortex of splendour like a new and brilliant constellation: the sphere which she adorned was for a time temperately propitious; but darkness suddenly overwhelmed it, and she has from that hour been destined to struggle with a tempest, fierce and unceasing.

The most busy demon of the storm was the abandoned Treville : a being, who living only for himself, who, wrapped in the flimsy garb of vanity, and considering woman as a creature formed for his amusement, marked every succeeding day with a new crime, at which, though reflection winked, humanity perpetually shuddered. To a woman of the world, a reasoning, rational, discriminating mortal, such an insect would have proved harmless ; she would have admired his exterior attractions, have contemplated his person with a mixture of admiration and pity ; while her judgment would have taught her to counteract the magic, the poisonous magic, which lurked beneath the finest work of nature.

Mr. Treville is a pupil of that modern school, which has exploded every thing like good nature, good sense, good manners, or goodness of heart, from the vocabulary of polite education. His
contempt

contempt for all the decorous proprieties of life, his assiduity to appear careless of every thing essential to dignity of mind, and his industry to prove, that the happiness of others was of little importance, when compared with his own gratifications, proclaimed him one of those ephemera who bask in the beams of fashionable life, dazzle as they flutter their short and senseless hour away, and steal to the oblivion of time, unregretted and forgotten.

To whom is the world indebted for this race of mortals, this augmenting legion of disgusting non-descripts? To women! To beings, vain, giddy, insignificant, and empty as themselves. As reason and mental cultivation become light in the scale of humanity, folly and licentiousness preponderate. The toil of education is, *a bore!* the man of learning, *a quix!* and the woman of sentiment, an object for universal ridicule!
for,

for, in these extraordinary times, when every thing rational seems verging to oblivion, and every thing preposterous approaching to its climax, man is like any thing but MAN; and manners are so degenerated by example, that, in another century, they are likely to produce a race of beings, aliens alike to nature, feeling, and rationality.

An author, whose works do honour to his memory, lamented that the days of chivalry were no more! He was a competent judge of the new system, not only politically, but morally: he beheld with regret the encroachments of those trivial pursuits, which incapacitate the soul for all that is glorious and energetic; which debilitate the mental faculties, contaminate the heart, and unharmonize all the principles of society. He read the minds of men, blotted and scrawled by vice, vanity, and folly. All that once distinguished the lords of the
creation,

creation, nearly obliterated by the palsy of custom; and all that could debase humanity, fostered into vigour by the hot sunshine of luxury and splendor: he contemplated the altered scene with sorrow and regret, where the pride of genius sickened under the sadness of neglect; the dignity of worth bowed before the arrogance of wealth; the heroism of love glowed only in the pages of romance; and woman, persecuted WOMAN, was taught to find her most relentless enemy, in that being, whom nature designed to cherish and protect her! But I am wandering from my subject. The past and present sufferings of Gertrude St. Leger led me through the mazes of reflection imperceptibly:—I return to her, and to her sorrows.

It is evident that a deep and incurable melancholy preys upon her repose. The cause is no less visible than the effect. Her bosom has long cherished a passion
for

for Lord Denmore, whose mind and manners, though unlike those of the modern school, have but too powerfully combined to increase the magic, and to render its fascinations indelible. I have little hope that this fatal enchantment will ever be dissolved; and I am confidently assured, that, if it continues, Gertrude will be the victim; for Lord Denmore never can be her husband—an unsurmountable barrier is placed between them.

Unhappy Gertrude! Born to a mysterious destiny; created to be wretched; deprived, in infancy, of all that maternal fondness could bestow; and ordained to perish by the knowledge of that secret, the developement of which would place thee above the frowns of fortune, the miseries of dependence!

The last night she passed in a delirium, which, while it subdued the powers of reflection, too plainly evinced the anguish
of

of her heart. How rarely, in these days of apathy, does the mind of woman evince such fatal sensibility! How exquisitely would such a character be delineated by the pen of a Rousseau; how worthy would she have been of such a lover as Petrarch; how nearly similar are her sorrows to those of the unfortunate Eloise!

This letter commences a correspondence, which shall not terminate till Gertrude's destiny is decided. A few days will perhaps close the mournful detail; for, if I mistake not, Lord Denmore has determined on an event which will elucidate every mystery:—A visitor is expected at the Castle, whose presence will either produce the commencement of Gertrude's felicity, or the termination of her despair.

LETTER C.

GERTRUDE *to* FRANCES.

Sept. 18, 1797.

My silence has been the effect of incapacity to fulfil the duties of friendship. Frances, I am subdued by mental conflicts—I am exhausted by the vicissitudes of my disastrous fortune: I have requested to be removed from this scene of anxiety and pain; and, the moment that I am able to quit my chamber, I shall depart for Ireland: there, my friend, will I repose my head on the bosom of sympathy, till the pulses of my brain shall be frozen, the sensibilities of my heart eternally tranquil.

I am told that a stranger is expected at the Castle. There was a time when
such

such intelligence would have awakened an interest in my bosom; but the repetition of grief deadens the nerve of susceptibility, and the most acute mental agonies become supportable, by benumbing the sense they feed on. I feel that the severest pang which my nature could sustain has been inflicted; and now destiny, thy victim sets thy sternest mandate at defiance.

LETTER CI.

The Same to the Same.

Sept. 19, 1797.

I AM still unable to quit my chamber; an enervating lassitude defeats all the efforts which I make for the restoration of my lost tranquillity, and I only labour to suppress the encroachments of melancholy,

lancholy, to experience, every hour, a new proof of its dominion.

A stranger is expected at the Castle. This intelligence absorbs my mind, when its faculties are not devoted to a more interesting object. Lord and Lady Melcomb arrived here yesterday; they came to assist in the celebration of Lord Denmore's wedding.—Lord Denmore's wedding! Frances, how my hand trembles while I write the words!

What an illustrious, what an exalted mind has that woman who was the object of his choice! How transcendently generous! how disinterestedly noble! Shall I prove an obstacle to the happiness of such a being? Shall I, because my heart has fixed its affections on one to whom I never shall be united, deprive her of such an husband? How torturing is the question! How does my conscious soul reprove me for hesitating a moment to answer it! Reason and gratitude command

mand me to make the effort; while every fibre of my bosom quivers at the attempt.

I blush at my own weakness: I shrink into insignificance, when I reflect on the degradation to which I expose myself. I will arouse this base, this yielding spirit: I will conquer the passion which feeds on my repose: I will relinquish every hope: abjure every sentiment of fondness: rise superior to the weakness of despondency; and resign Lord Denmore.

I feel like the shipwrecked mariner in the last moment of his despair. I behold a dark and terrifying abyss yawning to receive me: all around is fraught with horrors; and destruction, without a resisting effort, will be inevitable. Shall I attempt to save myself? or shall I tamely, like a coward, perish?

LETTER CII.

The Same to the Same.

Sept. 20, 1797.

I HAVE summoned all the proud resisting faculties of my soul: I have called them into action: they sustain my resolution: they convince me of what I have been: they shew me what I am; and instruct me what I ought to be.

Shall the proud spirit of my gallant father, the virtues of my lost mother, be forgotten? Shall no faint trace of them remain in the bosom of their orphaned child? Is there not such a thing as intuitive pride? instinctive virtue? hereditary fortitude? Is man to play the tyrant, and woman eternally to be the dupe of her own sensibility? No, Frances, no!

What

What has produced this change in my opinions? What has nerved this sensitive bosom even at the moment when it was nearly vanquished? Pride, Frances! the pride of an insulted heart! the indignant glow which conscious rectitude never fails to feel, when it is persecuted by the world's unkindness! It is no arduous task for beings, nursed in the lap of luxury, to smile and to be tranquil: they sleep undisturbed by dreams of anguish; they awake to experience all the advantages of fortune; they meet with the homage of an unthinking multitude; and they find, among the venal herd, fools and sycophants, who fawn them into self-approbation. Well may such beings assume a tranquil exterior; smile through their day of apathy; exult in what they call philosophy; and condemn the weary, restless, and repining spirit, which is stung and goaded by a disastrous fortune.

How

How little does the mortal, born in an exalted sphere, and nursed in luxurious splendor, know mankind! How superficially does he read the human heart! How falsely does he judge the world, through the deceptive medium which fortune holds betwixt him and his fellow-creatures! It is adversity alone that unfolds the page of knowledge: it is experience whose pencil justly delineates the rational, the reasoning atom, Man. It is truth alone that can sustain the mind; and nothing less than conscious truth can arm it in its journey through this mazy, this perplexing scene, to resist, to combat, and to vanquish.

You will be surprised, my dear Frances, when you read this philosophical letter: yet from a mind so perpetually agitated by contending conflicts, a world-sickened disgust might naturally be expected. I have long loathed all earthly scenes: I am become weary even of the delusions
of

of hope, the chimeras of imagination : I sink hourly into a species of lassitude, which, but for the stimulating power of scorn, would soon produce inanity.

I trust that a short period will effect a change in my mental system, which will be productive of repose : for the sorrows of sensibility, when they reach a certain climax, rise into fortitude, or soften into resignation ; as the wild surge rolls onward to the rocky shore, and there breaks in a soft murmur on the sand ; or, dashing with resistless fury, braves the stupendous bulwark that receives it.

LETTER CIII.

Miss STANLEY to FRANCES MONTGOMERY.

Sept. 22, 1797.

SINCE I wrote my last letter, the change in Miss St. Leger's mind has been progressively propitious: she has exerted her fortitude: she now feels that self-respect which genuine dignity of sentiment never fails to awaken; and I hope that a short period will completely restore her tranquillity.

She has now only one pang to encounter; and, however acutely she may feel it, I do not despair of her being able to combat its severity: for the keenest misfortunes, singly inflicted, may be borne; though a rapid accumulation of sorrows is rarely to be surmounted.

Lord

Lord Denmore confines himself almost entirely in his study. Lord and Lady Melcomb are here ; and, as fashionable friends care but little for the society of those whom they visit, to them the Castle loses no atom of attraction by the seclusion of its owner. Gertrude passes her hours chiefly in her chamber, writing and reading alternately ; and waiting, with apparent composure, for the arrival of the stranger.

This evening he is expected : Lord Denmore is restless, anxious, and impatient ; for, by the effect of this visit, the destiny of Gertrude, and the happiness or misery of her guardian, will be finally determined.

LETTER CIV.

GERTRUDE *to* FRANCES.

Sept. 24, 1797.

YESTERDAY afternoon, while I was reading in my chamber, the door suddenly opened, and Lord Denmore entered. I started at this abrupt intrusion, and was for a moment at a loss to account for it; but my suspense was of short duration, for with a smile, evidently assumed with some difficulty, my guardian informed me that the stranger was arrived, and waited impatiently to see me.

Without hesitation, I replied, that I was ready to attend him. Frances, my bosom seemed armed with a species of frozen indifference, which checked its throbbings, even while I felt the pres-

sure

sure of Lord Denmore's hand. No magnetizing pulse made my heart own a quickened circulation; no tremulous sensation bade my lip quiver as I spoke; no sigh escaped my bosom; no blush suffused my cheek; the reign of sensibility was suspended, and pride, sustained by reason, now held dominion over all my feelings.

With a calm countenance, and a steady pace, I accompanied Lord Denmore to the library, where, immediately on his opening the door, my eyes met those of Edward Ashgrove. For a moment the blood seemed to rush from my heart, and to deepen the colour of my cheek; but the revolution was transient—I recovered from my surprise, and received him without the smallest appearance of embarrassment. Little passed during the conversation that followed, which could either interest my feelings or awaken my curiosity. Lord

and Lady Melcomb, with Miss Stanley, shortly after joined us: dinner being served we repaired to the saloon, Lord Denmore taking my hand, and with a smile placing me at the upper end of the table.

With an unshaken composure I performed the task allotted me. I observed Lord Denmore's features, while they betrayed an agitation of soul which augmented my triumph. Now, thought I, it is your turn to suffer! I have passed the agonizing crisis which restored my mind to the energies of reason; I reflect with a blush of self-reproof on the weakness of my heart, and I exult in that victory, which will secure me from future degradation.

As soon as dinner was ended, the party retired to coffee in the drawing-room: "We will follow you immediately," said Lord Denmore, taking hold of my arm, and gently detaining me. As soon

as we were left alone, with a look, though serious not severe, Lord Denmore inquired whether I could now guess the person whom he had chosen to be my husband. Upon my hesitating to answer the question, he added: "Gertrude, your silence not only alarms but insults me. If I have been rightly informed, at a period not long past, you promised your hand to Mr. Ashgrove; tell me briefly, was it not so?"

"In a moment of awakened pity for his sufferings, my Lord, I confess that I did make such a promise: but his generous nature exonerated me from the observance of it, the moment that he knew it originated in a transitory sentiment."

"This is but a puerile subterfuge for a strong and liberal mind," said my guardian. "When a woman of honour once pledges her word, she cannot forfeit her promise but with the integrity

of her heart. Mr. Ashgrove is brave, he is amiable—”

“ Perfectly so,” interrupted I, sighing.

“ He loves you, Gertrude.”

“ I fear he does, my Lord.”

“ Why do you fear it? Can the affections of a man, whose character bears the stamp of innate worth, disgrace you?”

“ My Lord, I do not wish to marry. Indeed, since you have demanded an explicit answer,” said I, “ you shall have no further reason to reproach me. I have resolved —”

“ On what?” said Lord Denmore eagerly.

“ On remaining single,” answered I gravely.

“ That is your serious determination?”

“ Irrevocably.”

“ Then I have nothing more to propose,” cried my guardian; “ though my
felicity

felicity will be in some degree diminished by such a resolution, for I hoped —”

“What did you hope, my Lord?” interrupted I, trembling and confused.

“It will be useless now to utter another syllable,” replied my guardian. “I shall disclose the result of our conversation to Mr. Ashgrove, with as little delay as possible; and Heaven forbid that I should ever again distress your feelings on so interesting a subject! From this hour my lips shall be sealed in silence!” As he pronounced these words, he gravely bowed, and left me.

“My mind seemed to lose a considerable portion of its tranquillity by this short interview: Lord Denmore’s hopes were destroyed by my determination not to marry! Fancy suggested a thousand flattering interpretations of this unexpected avowal; and each seemed, by its inconsistency, to baffle and afflict me:

so varying, so inexplicable are the visions which haunt the brain, when its faculties are absorbed by one dear exclusive object; we endeavour to convince our reason at the expence of our judgment, we hang our heart's fondest hope on airy phantoms, till, like the gossamer that floats on the morning breeze, it insensibly becomes a part of that which bears it.

I observed Lord Denmore and his guests crossing the Park, and taking the path which led up the hill to the Parsonage: my soul was absorbed in meditation; and as the evening began to redden, I bent my steps towards my favourite retreat near the root-bridge. The mournful murmur of the brook increased the pensive sadness of my mind, and I felt as though I awaited some event of the most important interest.

The sky every moment became more obscure; the venerable trees waved their
thick

thick branches, as the wind passed over them; and the ivyèd nook, I thought, appeared more dark than ever. As I proceeded towards it, I observed the figure of a man just issuing from the wood which screened the solitary recess: he approached me: he came within a few paces; I saw him distinctly; he was unknown to me; and without further ceremony I demanded his business.—“ I am a stranger,” said he; “ but I am your friend, if your name is St. Leger.”

I answered, “ It is. ”

“ Then,” said he, with a tone of complacency which gave me confidence, “ I request to know, whether or not you are on the point of marriage ?”—I started.

“ I see that the question surprises you,” said the stranger: “ but if the report be true, and you purpose shortly to become a wife, suffer me to ask you, what is your fortune ?”

M 6

“ You

“ You must prove your claim to my confidence,” answered I sternly, “ before I answer such a question.”

“ You are proud, because you are wealthy,” said the stranger.

“ You mean to insult me,” interrupted I, turning from him. He snatched my arm—

“ Do you know Lord Arcot ?” cried he hastily.

“ I do.”

“ Has he not from time to time enriched you ?”

“ Heavens !” exclaimed I, “ What do you mean ?”

“ Has Lord Denmore never informed you that your fortune is immense, your expectations splendid ?”

“ Never !”

The stranger continued : “ That your mother was an heiress to almost countless wealth ; and that, in *her* right, *you* are the sole inheritor ?”

“ Merciful

“ Merciful powers ! Go on,” said I.

“ You knew my mother ?”

“ I did. She was the loveliest work of Nature !”

“ So I have often heard,” interrupted I.

“ You must have seen that which presented her just as she lived—”

“ A portrait ?

“ No ; a bust, after the model of the Grecian Sappho.”—I trembled convulsively.

“ It was cast from her features,” continued the stranger.”

“ Are you certain ?” said I.

“ Beyond a doubt, for I was present when the artist did it.” I thought I should have fainted.

“ Respect for her memory, for I was once her dearest friend, induced me to make this visit. Many years have elapsed since I last saw Lord Denmore. I have heard strange reports, and I came
hither

hither to satisfy my curiosity ; therefore I request that you will inform me, whether or not you have been happy under his protection ?”

“ Why do you ask the question ?”

“ Because,” added the stranger, “ if you are not so, I am determined to remove you.”

“ By what authority ?”

“ By the impulse of philanthropy, the bond of friendship, which bound me to your interest from your earliest years. Answer me candidly—Has Lord Denmore acted, in every sense, towards you as a man of honour ?” I hesitated.

“ Inform me briefly, for my time is precious,” continued the stranger ; “ if you are not happy here, there is another home ready to receive you—the habitation of Lord Arcot.”

“ Of Lord Arcot !” repeated I with astonishment. “ The atrocious miscreant ! He offer an asylum to an unhappy,

happy, persecuted woman! Impossible.— I have already experienced too many insults under his roof to risk their repetition.”

“ Reflect,” cried the stranger with an impressive energy ; “ I conjure you to reflect before you charge him with any action that would stigmatize his name : he would have been a friend, a guardian to you : he had the power to place you above the malevolence of the world ; to encircle you with happiness. Let me not suppose that by any imprudent step you forfeited his protection.”

“ Your language is inexplicable !” said I. “ Lord Arcot, it is true, has offered me considerable presents, indeed, a splendid income ; but with a motive at once insulting and dishonourable.”

“ You mistook his motive,” replied the stranger ; “ he wished to see you happy, to place you in those ranks of life which your personal and mental
graces

graces would have embellished. But you had fixed your affections on—”

“ Whom ?” interrupted I earnestly.

“ Lord Denmore.” I made no answer, but continued to walk by the stranger’s side along the wood. The moon had risen ; and the bright beams fell on the path where it was opened by intersecting vistas. I snatched every opportunity whenever a partial gleam fell on the stranger’s features. His countenance was manly and benignant : his dress, manners, and deportment pronounced him of the polished classes of society. After we had proceeded several paces, he renewed the conversation :

“ Since we have entered upon this important subject,” said he, “ suffer me to ask you without reserve, and tell me frankly, why you have placed your affections on a being whose age, manners, and disposition are so ill-suited to your own ? From one who is unknown to
you,

you, such a question may appear unauthorized; but there are reasons of the utmost importance why I should be satisfied."

"I esteemed Lord Denmore from my earliest infancy," said I: "I knew no other friend, no other guardian: he was a father to me: I had no parent else—" my tears prevented my proceeding, and I wept abundantly. The stranger again addressed me:

"It is useless to deceive you. I have been three days in the neighbouring village: I know all that is now in contemplation at the Castle. A simple girl, (in the service of Lord Denmore,) at whose father's house I am lodged, has informed me of every circumstance; of your guardian's purposed marriage; of your despair; of Mr. Ashgrove's arrival. Not only present prospects of inquietude, but past events have been unfolded to me; and I feel that the crisis is approaching,

proaching, which must destroy you, or snatch you from destruction." As he spoke, I heard voices and footsteps entering the wood: the stranger, darting among the trees, instantaneously vanished; and in a few moments, Miss Stanley, Lady Melcomb, and Mr. Ashgrove, presented themselves before me.

"Heavens! my dear girl!" cried Miss Stanley, "what can induce you to wander in this gloomy place at such an hour, alone?"

"What should I fear?" said I.

"Every thing," replied Miss Stanley: "the very owls and bats would terrify a less romantic mind."

"The owls and bats had little influence over Miss St. Leger's feelings," cried Mr. Ashgrove; "for, if I mistake not, her evening meditations were not wholly solitary."

"At least they were not silent," added Lady Melcomb: "but I have heard of
evil

evil spirits, which sometimes visit the moonlight paths of wandering beauty ; and, by magic incantations, conjure up such melancholy thoughts as tempt their hearers to deeds of desperation." While she was speaking, I observed Mr. Ashgrove looking inquisitively round him. I trembled : I scarcely saw my path. The powerful interest which the stranger had excited, encreased the fluttering of my heart, and I continued silent.

We returned to the Castle. Mr. Ashgrove appeared pensively sullen ; at times alternately restless and dejected. His eyes, during the remainder of the evening, frequently met mine ; but with a mixture of reproof and regret, which deeply affected me. Lady Melcomb, whose curiosity was raised to impatience, during supper expatiated on the beautiful scenery, the romantic solitudes, in the vicinity of the Castle. " Do you not find," said her Ladyship, addressing
Lord

Lord Denmore, "that the walks by moonlight are more inviting than when they are exposed to the glare of day? I think that I could wander about the woods eternally. This evening was peculiarly adapted to a pensive taste; and I make no doubt but your contemplative mind was infinitely gratified."

"I have passed the evening in my library," said Lord Denmore: "books have been my only companions; for, to speak truly, my spirits were ill-suited to society." A glance of indignation from the expressive eyes of Edward convinced me that Lady Melcomb's mischievous purpose was accomplished. She had awakened the demon, Jealousy, which had for a time lain dormant; and I began to anticipate effects from causes which alarmed and pained me. Lord Denmore, unconscious of her meaning, exhibited a countenance unmoved; but a faint flush on Miss Stanley's cheek convinced

vinced me that she was infected by the subtle poison, and that her pride had taken the alarm before her sober judgment was consulted.

For myself, I sat like a convicted criminal. My mind was absorbed in rumination, and my bosom throbbed with the contending emotions that possessed it. At one moment, I was fearful that the stranger's visit was nothing more than a new trial of Lord Arcot's machinations; the next, conjecture presented the untiring persecutions of the libertine Somerton. To him the secrets of my destiny had been communicated by Lord Denmore. The stories of my mother's splendid fortune, of the bust, and of Lord Arcot's proposals, were probably known to him; and by his authority repeated, in order to excite an interest in my bosom, and to allure me into new confidence, merely for the purpose of again deceiving.

Soon

Soon after supper I retired to my chamber. The first objects of contemplation were the remains of that model which once presented the resemblance of my lost mother. Oh, Frances! language cannot picture the awful sensation which thrilled through my heart, while I endeavoured, with trembling hands, to select any feature which might still be perfect; nor can my joy be described, when I found that nearly the whole of the countenance had escaped destruction. With eyes, from which a torrent of tears fell involuntarily, I gazed on the precious fragment. I raised it to my lips; kissed it with a mixture of tenderness and awe; talked to it in the language of filial affection; pressed it to my bosom, and on my knees invoked the gentle spirit of my angelic parent to sustain my soul, and to soothe it into resignation.

The mask, which I continued to contemplate with an aching bosom, seemed

to smile upon me. The whiteness of the alabaster presented the paleness of a corpse: I shuddered; "So did she look," said I wildly, "when the hand of death snatched her eternally from me; when my infant breast was given to the miseries of life, unshielded, and unconscious of impending sorrows." Again I pressed the relique to my bosom; again I was bathing it with a shower of tears, when I heard a deep sigh in my chamber.

I started; but saw nothing. I arose from my supplicating attitude, and would have laid the mask upon my pillow, but I had no longer power to move; my feet seemed rooted to the spot; my hands were chilled by the cold fragment which they grasped; and the pulses of my brain, to me, beat audibly. The Castle clock struck twelve: each distinct vibration seemed to smite my heart, while I expected every instant to see the pale vision of my departed mother.

"O God!"

“ O God !” exclaimed I with a tremulous voice, “ sustain my fortitude, or my senses will forsake me. And thou, my angel parent !—”

Another sigh I heard arrested my voice, and I sunk prostrate on the carpet.

The concussion shook the library over which I fell ; and in a few moments Lord Denmore burst into my chamber. I was sensible of his approach ; but I had not power to speak : he raised me : the shattered parts of the bust which lay on the table, and the mask, which my hand still held with a convulsive eagerness, led him to suppose that my terrors were excited by the accident of breaking it. “ Ah, Gertrude !” said he, “ what have you done ? This bust was the resemblance of—”

“ My mother !” interrupted I with frantic energy. Lord Denmore fixed his dark and exploring eyes upon me. “ God of mercies !” exclaimed he,

“ who told you so ? ” I leant upon his shoulder, and my whole frame shook, almost to annihilation. His features were ghastly ; his limbs trembled ; his looks were wild and haggard. The chamber was gloomy ; the light, burnt to the socket, quivered feebly. The sighs which I had heard, the pale resemblance of my mother, the damp cold hand with which Lord Denmore held my arm, the hour of midnight, and the castle clock marking the quarter with one solitary vibration, took from me every power of reflection, and I shrieked as I hid my face upon his bosom.

He sunk upon his knee, for he had not strength to support me : “ Ah, my Gertrude ! ” said he, folding me to his heart : “ arouse, exert yourself, call reason to your aid ; speak ! speak, my darling Gertrude ! ”—At this moment the door flew open, and Mr. Ashgrove entered the chamber.

“ My Lord, desist,” said he, “ or this sword shall pierce your heart !” I ventured to look towards him : his face was strongly marked with rage and indignation ; his feelings were depicted in every lineament. Lord Denmore raised me ; “ Fear not, my beloved Gertrude,” said he ; “ fear not : my life has long been irksome to me ; and that being who would rid me of it, would be my friend !” Then speaking to Mr. Ashgrove, he added : “ Return to your chamber ; in a few hours your doubts shall be removed, your feelings satisfied : but have a care how you irritate me farther ; for these are insults, which it would be infamy to bear. Remember, we have already had a *rencontre*—the second must end the contest, for one of us shall perish.”

Lord Denmore waited with stern composure for Mr. Ashgrove’s answer. After a pause of some moments, “ Agreed !”
said

said Edward—" Twelve hours shall end the contest ; and it shall be, in the full acceptation of the word, decisive." So saying he quitted the room. Lord Denmore again pressed me to his heart, conjured me to compose my mind, and left me.

I passed the hours from day-break in writing ; and though exhausted, faint, and sickening with overwhelming sorrows, I am preparing to visit the stranger's lodging, to demand an explanation, and then to await the hour which shall decide Lord Denmore's fate, *and mine*. Frances, farewell.

LETTER CV.

The Same to the Same.

Sept. 26, 1797.

I HAVE been at the stranger's lodgings. He departed soon after day-break, first presenting the family a bank-note of twenty pounds for his few day's concealment. What can it mean? He must have been, as I conjectured, employed by Mr. Somerton for the most abandoned purpose. I will think of it no more: I will not busy my distracted brain by delusive fancies, while the dreadful certitude of accumulating grief demands my resistance.

Every thing I hear and see seems inexplicable! Lord Denmore and Mr. Ashgrove have passed the whole morning

ing together : they are evidently friends. How am I to interpret this sudden change, this extraordinary reconciliation ? At all events, I thank Heaven that Lord Denmore is safe— ! I am interrupted.

It was Patty with a letter from Mrs. Walters : I inclose it, and for a short period bid you farewell.

(The inclosed Letter.)

Mrs. WALTERS to GERTRUDE.

Manor-House, Sept. 24, 1797.

I TAKE the first opportunity, my dear Miss Gertrude, to let you know what has happened ; and I am sure that you will think with me, that the wickedness of this world is become intolerable. But not to keep you in suspense, I inform you, that the whole country is in an uproar,

and that every body cries shame at such abominable conduct.

To be sure there never was any thing equal to it ! Some say one was to blame, and some say another ; but all agree in condemning both parties.

What think you, Miss Gertrude ? For my part, I have no patience. What times do we live in, when such scandalous doings, such shame-faced conduct, should be permitted to put modesty out of countenance ! But not to keep you waiting any longer, it happened only yesterday—Lord have mercy ! How people do talk ! All the young damsels are blushing like any thing, and all the saucy youngsters in the neighbourhood are laughing and snickering, and making their jokes ; so that I am afraid to shew my face lest I should hear some of their impudent ribaldry.—But I have lost the thread of my story.—Only last night ! Who would have believed it ? I am sure

I never

I never gave ear to any of the wicked reports which old gossips told me; I thought that it was nothing but scandal—and I shall be laughed at for the rest of my days, for being less wise than my neighbours. But, to go on.

The clock had just struck ten; the parson's daughter had been gone about an hour, after reading one of the Doctor's new sermons, as fine a discourse as ever was penned; when lo, and behold, in comes one of our hinds, and ups and tells us the whole story! I thought verily I should have swooned; though the impudent varlet laughed in my face, and told me it was all the fashion with people of quality, and that nothing but old-maidish frumps cared a straw about it: so I turned the impudent knave out of the room, and began to write this epistle, which I hope you will receive safe and in good health.

Since my Lady Arcot and Mr. Somerton set off, my Lord has been as unkind as an owl. I went over to the Hall this morning, and found things all at sixes and sevens; my Lord almost beside himself, and my Lady gone, sure enough! My master went over to the Hall as soon as you left the Manor-house; and there he has been nursed and brought about, as God would have it, to cuckold my Lord—and all that—which I have not the face to tell you. Where they are jaunted off to nobody knows; but every body thinks they are gone for no good purpose. God bless you, my dear Miss Gertrude, and keep you from such wicked ways, and protect you.

From your humble servant,

DOROTHY WALTERS.

LETTER CVI.

GERTRUDE *to* FRANCES.

Sept. 28, 1797.

I AM this instant returned from the Parsonage, I fear, eternally deprived of the good Rector's friendship. Alas, Frances! the persecuting demon which governs my destiny will never quit its prey while my bosom is warmed by vitality.

On entering the Parsonage, I read my misfortune in the features of my misguided friends. My proud heart would not permit me to inquire the cause of the coldness I experienced, though its conjectures interpreted the effects. Mr. Pew, whose bosom is replete with every thing that is honourable to humanity, arose as I approached him; and with a countenance of sorrow, with tears gush-

ing from his eyes, inarticulately addressed me :

“ I can readily guess the motive of your visit : you are banished from the Castle : you have lost the protection of Lord Denmore. I grieve to see you so situated, my dear child ; and even at the peril of my Lord’s displeasure, I am ready to receive you.” He passed his hand over his eyes ; while Mrs. Pew, who sat mute and earnestly attentive, sighed as if her heart were breaking.

“ Alack !” continued the Rector, “ we are but frail and feeble creatures. It is the task of benevolent minds to look with pity on the misguided. Religion tells us to compassionate the child of error ; and Nature pleads strongly for the sad and unprotected. Come then to my home, forlorn but still dear child of sorrow : come and be happy.” Mrs. Pew took my hand : the Rector reached me a chair. I looked alternately at them ;

and my heart felt its circulation chilled to the very centre. I took my seat. Mrs. Pew, with a tone mild and consoling, bade me have courage. Her smile was evidently blended with a cast of melancholy, which pierced my bosom by the strong power of sympathy; while I kissed her cheek, but had not courage to address her.

She rose and led me towards the garden. "You are too much distressed to speak, my love," said she mildly: "perhaps a walk will revive your spirits." I bent my head, and we proceeded along the garden-path, towards the churchyard. At that moment my eyes met the monument of the Denmore family. I shuddered. "We will look at the beautiful tablet which my Lord has placed over the vault, to the memory of his wife," continued Mrs. Pew.

"Blessed be her repentant spirit!" sighed the Rector.

I looked towards the mausoleum. Upon a white marble tablet I read the name and age of Lady Denmore. The inscription was Latin; but it was the last tribute of regret, inscribed by a forgiving philanthropic mind, to the memory of a lovely but misguided victim. He gave not her withered form to an obscure grave. He denied not a long and last asylum to that heart, which was frozen by the inevitable touch, that from feeling minds obliterates the impression of past wrongs, while it calls forth the tear of pity and forgiveness. No false degrading pride, no fell vindictive spirit reigned in his bosom: he felt her last sigh, compunction-prompted, vibrate on his heart: he refused not to mingle his dust with her's, when the emancipated soul had passed the gulph which leads from life to death; from contrite sorrow, to eternal happiness.

With

With a mixture of regret and admiration, I stood for some time near the monument. My eyes then turned towards the Castle, where Lady Denmore once bloomed, the fairest flower in Nature's variegated garden. Reflection sighed to trace her melancholy progress from rectitude to dishonour; from felicity to anguish: yet, while meditation pictured the melancholy effects, it shuddered at their cause. Ambition! that gaudy tyrant, whose iron sceptre, cased in the glittering poison, gold, bends even the noblest natures to its purpose! Ambition! which perverts the mind, contaminates the heart, allures its vassal from the paths of rectitude and honour, makes reason, justice, and humanity shrink into shadows; while it fosters the mean, degrading vice, self-interest, even in defiance of those laws which harmonize society. Ah, Frances! in my short but restless journey through the mazes of existence,

existence, I have seen wretches profane their faith and honour, fashion their principles, betray their friends, change their opinions, fawn on the base, plunder the unwary, and set the bold intruder, Conscience, at defiance; and all to gratify a false ambition; to enjoy for a few short years a visionary splendour, which must inevitably fade, and leave their names to perpetual execration. How abject are such beings! How far beneath the poorest children of independent virtue! How little do they dream that they are the scorn and scoff of a reflecting multitude; that though they herd with natures congenial to their own, and bask alike in the smiles of fortune and of folly, they are abhorred by the enlightened, shunned by the liberal, hated by the virtuous, and pitied by the wise.

We strolled along the church-yard, whose cypress walk invites the meditating wanderer, till the sun began to set.

Though

Though the good Rector was almost uniformly silent, I plainly perceived the emotions of his soul in every feature of his countenance. The melancholy which impressed my mind, at the same time gave it composure: no wild, no tumultuous throbbing shook my heart: it was softened, harmonized, and tranquil. We returned to the Parsonage. On entering the parlour, Mr. Pew informed me that my chamber would be prepared, as usual, for my reception. "Your books are still arranged as you left them," said he; "and here you may fix your home." I smiled and thanked him.

"Nay, my dear child, thank me not," interrupted the Rector: "I do no more than is my duty: my doors are open to the houseless wanderer: the means that I possess are only lent me for the purpose of consoling the unhappy: I will be a faithful steward, till it pleases the Omnipotent

nipotent Disposer of events to appoint another.

Convinced that Mr. Pew's conversation proceeded from an erroneous opinion of my motive in visiting the Parsonage, I now thought it was time to undeceive him. "From what cause do you imagine that I stand in need of an asylum?" said I half-smiling.

"I have heard it all," said the Rector: "we are frail creatures."

"What have you heard?" interrupted I gravely.

"Of your meeting the unknown visitor, whose mysterious conduct has excited much conjecture throughout the whole village."

"Is it known that he resided here?" said I with evident confusion: "did you see him? have you heard his name?"

"I saw him twice," replied the Rector. "I met him as he was ascending from the valley: we entered into con-

conversation : I found his manner pleasing, and his mind cultivated : he spoke of Lord Denmore, of you, and of himself."

" What did he say ?"

" He called himself a traveller ; a citizen of the world."

" Did he declare his motive for visiting the Castle ?"

" He did not," replied the Rector : " he dared not speak to me on such a subject."

" Still you are in error," said I : " did he not mention his name or the place of his future destination ?"

" Neither."

" Would to Heaven I knew either," said I sighing. Mr. Pew looked intently in my face, and with a slight contraction of his brow replied ; " You are playing the hypocrite : you insult me by this seeming ignorance : I will hear no more."

We were standing near the window ;
and

and as he spoke I saw the stranger cross the church-yard. "There! there he goes!" said I; at the same time darting towards the door. The Rector caught my arm, and forcibly detaining me, conjured me to reflect, to shun the tempter, to be prudent."

"On him my fate depends," said I; "and I must follow him." I struggled to get free, but Mr. Pew still held my arm: "Consider what you meditate," said he earnestly; "remember the untimely fate of Lady Denmore; put not your trust in the professions of man: he will ultimately deceive you." I was deaf to his admonitions, till by a strong effort I tore myself from him, and rushed towards the garden. The stranger had disappeared: I entered the church-yard: it was now near the close of twilight: I traversed the cypress walk: I measured, with hasty steps, the intersecting paths: all was solitary, silent, gloomy: I shivered with

with horror: I leaned my folded arms upon the Denmore monument: it seemed to freeze my bosom: I started from the spells of melancholy, which began to fasten on me; and repassing the church-yard gate, hastened to the abode of Patty's father. There my inquiries proved unsuccessful: the stranger had not returned, and I at length felt hopeless.

I now bent my way towards the Castle. Crossing the park, I met Patty: she was in tears: she stopped; but she had not power to speak. I took her arm, and inquired the cause of her distress. After a conflict of sighs and sobbings, she informed me that she had been searching for me in every part of the Castle, in all the avenues of the grounds, in the wood, at the root-bridge. "Ah, Miss Gertrude!" said she, pressing my hand, and shedding a fresh torrent of tears, "I thought you had either drowned yourself, or gone away with
the

the strange gentleman ; and I reproached my conscience, because it was I that told him you went every evening to the root-bridge."

Patty's artless confession extorted my forgiveness. I had not resolution to condemn her curiosity, when I reflected that it originated in her anxiety for my safety. Encouraged by my complacency, she drew from her bosom a small folded paper, unsealed, and directed for me with a pencil. It was from the stranger ; and contained these words :

" Motives, at present inexplicable,
" compel me to change the place of my
" abode : I must, nevertheless, see you
" again, and that speedily. I charge
" you, if you value your own happiness,
" not to determine on any step respect-
" ing marriage, till I have again con-
" versed with you. To-morrow even-
" ing I shall expect you at the corner of
" the church-yard facing the meadows.

" Be

“ Be confident : fear nothing : but above
“ all things fail not to meet

“ The Traveller.”

“ Where did you get this note ?” said I eagerly.

“ From the strange gentleman,” replied Patty : “ I met him at the root-bridge, where I was searching after you ; and he wrote it before me on the ivy bench. His hand trembled so that he could scarcely hold the pencil. I am sure he was sorely grieved about something ; for his face was the picture of disappointment. It was a long time before I would consent to take the letter ; for I was afraid of what might follow : but he assured me solemnly that he was your friend, and that he meant no harm whatever.”

“ Did you tell him any thing respecting what has passed at the Castle ?” said I.

Patty’s face became scarlet.

“ Nay, child, confess all, and I will forgive you,” added I.

“ Yes,

“ Yes, Ma’am, to be sure I did venture to trust him a little.”

“ More than a little,” interrupted I.

“ I told him that you was in love with my Lord; and that he was going to be married to Miss Stanley; but that he had put off the wedding all of a sudden, nobody knew why.”

“ Did you reveal nothing more?”

“ Yes, I told him that my Lord was very melancholy at times; and that he was given to talking to himself about you; that every servant in the family thought you were in love with each other; and that our old housekeeper, Mrs. Walters, often said so, though I was sworn not to mention it; neither will I.”

“ Did you say any thing else?” Patty seemed to recollect; and in a few moments replied, “ O yes, Ma’am! I told him about my finding your picture in the library, and throwing it into the brook.”

“ What

“What did he say in answer?”

“He shook his head; and said, that he feared Lord Denmore was a villain.”

“Well! go on,” said I: “confess all, and relieve my mind from the suspense which tortures it.”

“I dare be sworn you have a great deal to answer for,” said Patty, sighing deeply.

“Proceed,” interrupted I: “proceed with your story, for I am impatient.” She continued:

“Then I told him, that Mr. Ashgrove was come, as the servants said, to court you; but that upon his finding my Lord in your bed-chamber—”

“Heavens! did you tell him that?” said I hastily.

“To be sure,” replied Patty: “like you, he desired me to confess every thing; as so I did; for what signified concealing what all the family knew.”

“And

“ And what said the stranger? inquired I with evident trepidation.

“ Why, he replied, that he could not have supposed Lord Denmore such a scoundrel; but that he would hear what you said upon the subject, and then take such steps as should settle every thing.”

“ You have ruined me: you have destroyed my hopes for ever,” said I sternly.

“ God Almighty forbid!” exclaimed Patty, changing colour and trembling, “ I meant to serve you, he knows, by telling the gentleman how miserably you passed your days and nights at the Castle; and as for my Lord, I don’t care a pin if he turns me out of his service to-morrow; for he is good for nothing but to ruin young women, as he has ruined you.”

“ Have a care, child, what you say upon that subject,” cried I gravely: “ Lord Denmore is my guardian; he has never ruined me.”

“ More

“ More shame for him,” said Patty :
“ a fine sort of a guardian, forsooth, to
break into your bed-chamber, and to
behave so scandalously. I told the
strange gentleman how you screeched ;
and how you was near going into fits ;
and how Mr. Ashgrove came with his
drawn sword ; and how my Lord hug-
ged you, and palavered, and tried to coax
you to be silent ; for, to tell you the
truth, I was all the time in the closet.”

“ How dared you listen to what I was
doing ?” said I sternly.

“ Because I was afraid you would
make away with yourself, as you wanted
to do the other day ; so I hid, in hopes
of preventing you ; and, God is my
judge, I thought my heart would burst
with sighing all the while you was talk-
ing to the broken image ; for I believed
that you was out of your mind, by the
things you said, and by your kissing a
piece of cold clay. One might find

something better than that to kiss, thinks I, but some folks have odd fancies, and this is one of them."

"I thought I heard a sigh once or twice," said I.

"O you might have heard half a score," interrupted Patty; "for I never was so grieved in all my days: I longed to come out of the closet, and cry with you."

"Well, child," said I, "it is now too late to repent."

"The more is the pity," sighed the simple girl; "and my Lord ought to be hooted out of the village, for taking advantage, and getting the better of such an innocent young Lady; and so I told the strange gentleman; and I thought he would have gone out of his wits; for he stamped and tore, and put himself in such a taking! I am sure I was so flurried I could hardly find my way back to the Castle; and if I had met my Lord,

it is odds but I should have given it him, though he is my betters; for what signifies being put-upon quietly. I don't value a Lord no more than the dust under my shoes, when he forgets himself and behaves unseemly: and if he was here on this very spot, I would tell him so to his face." At this moment we heard footsteps approaching. Poor Patty, supposing that it was Lord Denmore, set off on full speed across the Park; while I, even amidst all my vexations, could not help smiling at her vaunted spirit, which was too volatile not to evaporate on the approach of danger.

Frances! farewell. This night I will once more meet the traveller: he cannot lead me through the delusive mazes of fancy; for my soul is cased in a shield, formed by the demon of despair; and rendered, by repeated trials, impenetrable.

LETTER CVII.

The Same to the Same.

Sept. 29, 1797.

MR. Ashgrove's conduct convinces me that his proud heart is struggling to relinquish a pursuit, in which it does not hope for the smallest degree of reciprocity. How much do I envy those reasoning, philosophic minds, which can methodize the impulses of passion by the cold medium of prudential forethought! Can beings who really love, collect, examine, discriminate, and reject, as propriety and self-preservation shall prompt them! Ah, Frances! if the passions of the human heart can be taught subjection: if the pure sensations of exalted minds are to be systemized into coldness, happy is the Anchorit who vegetates in solitude;

tude; who beholds the sun rise on his hovel, without one promised joy to mark its journey; and who watches its last receding lustre, unconscious of reproof, unwearied by disappointment.

Why? O why was I not formed of that stubborn clay, which could resist impressions that debase me? Why was that sensitive compound, which is the source of vitality, exposed to pangs that even a Stoic's breast would shrink from? Religion tells us, that we are chastised for some unknown purpose; and that our reward will be proportionate to our submission. Ah, Francès! if I have deserved the punishment that has been unceasingly inflicted, why do I behold wretches, tenfold deep in crimes, exulting, prosperous, and happy? Let the theologian solve this problem. I fear it is undefinable. Reason shrinks while it attempts to explore the mystery; and, as long as it continues

o 3 inexplicable,

inexplicable, the poison of scepticism will never be extirpated.

You will be surprized at this calmly reasoning language from me, at a period when the clue to my destiny is about to be unravelled: but this is the moment for reflection: this is the epocha when I must prove myself either more than what I have hitherto seemed; or less than what, as the pupil of Lord Denmore, I ought to be.

I think it is Rousseau who says, that "the bravery of battle is mechanical." If, then, the mind can be wrought to bear up against the dangers of annihilation, why can it not be self-steeled against the perils of existence?

The traveller will probably decide my fate. A strange presentiment thrills through my bosom, while I anticipate the result of our approaching interview. He tells me that I am heiress to a splendid fortune. If he speaks truth,
can

can the most boundless wealth ensure me happiness, unless I share it with the object of my choice? If he has deceived me, he is an impostor; more atrociously criminal in having awakened hopes merely for the pleasure of destroying them.

I have heard, that before a convulsion of nature the elements are calm, even to profound silence. How far the mental and the mundane system may be said to resemble each other in this respect, I will not attempt to examine. A few hours, Frances, will solve this hypothesis: a very few hours, or there is no such actuating power as instinct.

Half the day has passed in thought. I have endeavoured to beguile my mind with the charm of prophetic intuition. But where is the prescient power which can give assurance of fortitude in the hour of disappointment? Alas! I have been alternately the slave of hope and of
o 4 despair;

despair; of flattering and appalling prospects. How illusive is the theory of philosophy! how difficult is the practice! how facile is every mental acquirement, when placed in competition with self-knowledge.

I will close my letter in a few hours.

Evening.

Another note from the traveller. I inclose it. I tremble at the idea of procrastinating our interview. Human fortitude hangs on a substance so tenuous, that the slightest breath may shake it into nothing. Heaven knows if to-morrow I shall feel that resisting spirit which has to-day sustained me.

Farewell. I await the trial.

(The inclosed Letter.)

“ We must not meet till to-morrow.

“ A sudden repetition of our interview

“ may alarm the vigilance of those

“ whom,

“ whom, till conviction authorizes re-
“ venge, I wish to avoid. I also think
“ it advisable to change the purposed
“ scene of rendezvous. The church-
“ yard path is overlooked by the Par-
“ sonage; and, by some conversation
“ which I have had with the Rector, I
“ find that his suspicion is awakened.

“ To-morrow at sun-set I will wait
“ for you at the entrance of the hazle
“ copse, on the hill-side. There is a
“ small cottage to the left: it is the
“ place of my concealment. Remem-
“ ber—at sun-set—there you will meet
“ The Traveller.”

LETTER CVIII:

The Same to the Same.

October 1, 1797.

2 o'clock, past midnight.

LAST evening, according to the traveller's appointment, I departed at sun-set for the hazle copse on the hill-side. A timid agitation possessed my mind as I crossed the Park. I felt my bosom shudder; and my heart beat convulsively. As I opened a gate which led to a narrow lane, I observed a post-chaise advancing. It passed me. The blinds were drawn down; and the postillions drove with more than common expedition. My mind was too intently occupied by the promised elucidations which the traveller mentioned, to be diverted by any event which I deemed irrelative to that
master-

master-key, which was to unlock the secret of my destiny. I continued therefore to ascend the hill, till I came within sight of the spot where I had promised to meet the stranger. A narrow beaten path led to the copse. The last tinge of golden light fell upon the yellow leaves; and the hum of the night-beetle met my ear in every direction. On one side, the horizon was glowingly variegated; on the other, the moon shed its sickly beams over a cold and untinted sky. As I approached the copse, the notes of the nightingale seemed to enliven the augmenting gloom, and to pour consolation as well as courage into my bosom. Alas, Frances! none but those who have experienced the very acme of sorrow, can tell what apparently unimportant objects have power to solace even its severest tumults. There have been moments in my life when I have been roused from despondency, or sooth-

ed into repose, by the moaning of a summer breeze, the rippling of a rivulet, or the buzzing songs of those insect myriads which open their minute eyes with the morning-sun, and, as its last beam fades, close them for ever.

When I arrived at the entrance of the copse, it was near the dusk of twilight. I had walked slowly; for my strength was considerably diminished by my recent inquietude: I was also fearful that, while the light rendered distant objects visible, the danger of detection might prevent the traveller's fulfilling his engagement. After waiting near a quarter of an hour, I heard some one approaching; and concluding that it was the person whom I longed to behold once more, I hastened to meet him: but how shall I picture the horrors which seized my mind, when, instead of the interesting, the benignant traveller, I beheld Lord Arcot.

“ You

“ You are betrayed, deceived,” said his Lordship ; “ and nothing less than a prodigious effort can save you from destruction. Place yourself under my protection ; hasten to my carriage, which waits at the foot of the hill, and leave me to encounter the impostor.”

“ Whom do you mean ?” said I, trembling and near fainting.

“ You are prodigiously inquisitive,” replied Lord Arcot with trepidation : “ but if you are not capable of knowing your own danger, and resisting it, I must take other steps for your preservation ;” so saying, he waved his handkerchief, which being just visible, proved a signal for two servants to obey : they rushed from the copse ; and, as they approached, exclaimed, “ My Lord ! the villain escaped ; and, on his entering the wood, we lost sight of him.”

Lord Arcot seemed almost frantic. “ He must be pursued,” said he in a low voice :

voice : “ he is a robber and an impostor : dead or alive, you shall have a thousand guineas for taking him. I will meet you at the place appointed ; and there we will settle the business.” Lord Arcot, while he spoke, still grasped my hand. Terror and surprise had made me listen in silence : but on his servants disappearing, my fears augmenting, awakened my resolution ; and, struggling to get from him, I shrieked repeatedly.

I now heard a voice demanding what was the matter ; and whence the shrieks proceeded. Lord Arcot, terrified by the approach of an unwelcome intruder, rushed into the copse, and in a moment Mr. Ashgrove caught me in his arms ; at the same time inquiring by whom I had been assaulted. I could not speak : my apprehensions, my surprise, overpowered me. “ Ah, Gertrude !” exclaimed the brave, the generous Edward ; “ have I once more the happiness
of

of rescuing you from insult? Why, why did you venture, at such an hour, to a place so lonely, so convenient for a villain's purpose? In whom did you place such dangerous confidence?"

"I know not," said I, leaning on his arm, which entirely supported me.

"Not know!" repeated Edward sceptically: "impossible! This is neither a time of night, nor a situation, which you would select to meet a stranger: but I can easily satisfy my curiosity, since you refuse to tell me," added Mr. Ashgrove; "for, not fifty paces off, I passed a chaise. I can learn all I wish to know from the postillions." I still leant on his arm; and, with tottering steps, began to re-tread the descending path. We soon reached the carriage. Edward, with an authoritative tone, commanded the post-boys to follow us. They obeyed; and we proceeded homeward.

On

On our arrival at the Castle, lights being brought, Mr. Ashgrove instantly perceived, on the pannels of the chaise, the arms of Lord Arcot. His consternation was visible in every feature: but language cannot describe the countenance of Lord Denmore; while Lady Melcomb maliciously exclaimed, "I told you that the woods were infested with evil spirits. The sentimental wanderer had other temptations in her paths, beside the moon's pale beams, or the owls and bats which haunt them."

"Is Lord Arcot the favoured rival of Mr. Ashgrove?" said Lord Melcomb: "is age and experienced profligacy to win the prize of innocence and youth; while manly and liberal bosoms are stung by a refusal?"

"Such is the fashion of the time," sighed Lady Melcomb, as we entered the library; "for we daily see forward romantic girls throwing themselves into
the

the arms of hoary-headed libertines, who are panting for popularity, without even a pretension to character."

"This is no time for moralizing," interrupted Lord Denmore: "precept will not reform the world, while practice is sanctioned by example. Were Lord Arcot a thousand shades darker in infamy, while he can bribe by wealth, and command by patronage, he will be worshipped by the sordid, and applauded by the base: but he still wants one necessary attendant on villany."

"Courage!" interrupted Mr. Ashgrove; "for on my approach he fled."

"Let us pursue him!" cried Lord Denmore hastily.

"Have you Miss St. Leger's permission?" inquired Lady Melcomb.

"Most assuredly!" said I with a smile that repaid her malevolence. Lord Denmore now rang the bell: a servant entered.

tered. "Get my pistols, and load them," said he.

"Mine are ready," added Mr. Ashgrove.

"And I will stay to guard the women," cried Lord Melcomb. I caught Lord Denmore's hand as he was quitting the room.

"Yet hear me," said I; while my voice faltered, and my hand trembled; "you must not, you shall not go!"

"I thought so!" muttered Lady Melcomb.

"Not go!" cried Lord Denmore, throwing me from him: "for what reason should I suffer such an outrage to pass unpunished?"

"So you term it," said Lady Melcomb; "but perhaps Miss St. Leger is of a different opinion."

"If she be!" replied my guardian sternly; "let her confess her infamy, and follow

follow him." I again snatched his hand, and held him with all my strength.

"It was not Lord Arcot I went to meet: it was—"

"Whom?" inquired Lord Denmore eagerly.

"A stranger."

"By Heavens 'tis false!" said my guardian.

"Indeed, my Lord, it was a stranger; a traveller, a dear friend of my dead mother's."

"His name?" faintly articulated Lord Denmore.

"I know it not, my Lord."

"His condition?"

"Of that also I am ignorant."

"Where did you first see him?"

"At the root-bridge. He had some interesting secrets to disclose: he had awakened my curiosity by such extraordinary circumstances: but he deceived me."

"In

“ In what respect ? ”

“ He told me I was heiress to a splendid fortune.” Lord Denmore started.

“ Wonderful ! ” exclaimed Lady Melcomb with a sarcastic sneer : “ but evil spirits are much given to falsehood.” I watched Lord Denmore’s countenance : it was strongly expressive of profound reflection ; mingled with surprise, at once sceptical and excessive. After a pause, which was filled up by grimace and gestures on the part of Lady Melcomb, while Miss Stanley stood mutely attentive, Lord Denmore, as if aroused from his reverie, addressing Mr. Ashgrove, exclaimed, “ By Heavens ! I will be satisfied. This is either a fabricated tale, formed on conjecture, and uttered for the purpose of deceit ; or—”

“ What, my Lord ? speak without hesitation ! ” said I firmly. Lord Denmore held his pressed hands upon his bosom

bosom for a few moments ; then, desiring Mr. Ashgrove to follow him, suddenly rushed out of the library. I would have prevented his departure, but Lady Melcomb detained me. My heart was almost bursting with the conflicts of hope and fear ; while Miss Stanley took my hand, and conjured me to compose my spirits. I threw myself on a sofa, and gave way to tears ; while Lady Melcomb hummed a song, and her Lord, taking a volume from one of the shelves, deliberately began to read. This evident mockery of my sorrow excited my indignation. I rose abruptly ; and quitting the room, resolved to set out in search of Mr. Ashgrove and Lord Denmore.

Agitated by apprehensions for my guardian's safety ; for even at this moment his image filled my soul, excluding every other. I hastened towards the spot where I had been surprized by Lord Arcot,

Arcot, and where I had appointed to meet the traveller. The light of the moon rendered every object distinct, even at a considerable distance; and, conscious that the thread of my existence hung on the preservation of Lord Denmore, whose destruction would inevitably annihilate me, I was little mindful of my situation, or of the perils with which it was environed: I also relied on the dastardly nature of Lord Arcot, as a security for my escaping farther molestation from him; and I still rested a flattering hope on the stranger's interest in my happiness.

As I ascended the path towards the hill, I perceived two men walking hastily. I could faintly hear a humming sound, as they conversed; and, after I had followed them some paces, I observed them separate. One took the road to the village; the other proceeded hastily towards the copse. Fearful of being left alone,

alone, and still anxious to overtake Lord Denmore, I stood still, undetermined what step to pursue. The clear light fell upon my figure, and rendered me visible; for in a few moments, to my utter astonishment, Lord Arcot again approached me, from the lane where the post-boys had been ordered to wait with his carriage.

“Have you seen the stranger?” said he with evident perturbation.

“I have not, my Lord! Would to Heaven I could!” answered I with an assumed courage.

“Will you place yourself under my protection?” said Lord Arcot: “I will convey you to him: he is my friend: have confidence in my honour: speak quickly, for here your danger is prodigious!”

“I am beyond the reach of fear, my Lord!” said I sternly: “my heart is too
full

full of grief to admit any less powerful associate."

"The stranger whom you wish to see is waiting not far off," cried Lord Arcot: "I only left him five minutes since in the meadow leading to the village."

"May I believe you?" said I earnestly: "are you not again deceiving me?"

"By the veracity of a nobleman, I am not," replied Lord Arcot. I could with difficulty suppress a smile, when I recollected the conduct of my companion, and heard the pledge he gave of his sincerity.

"I know not what to do: I dare not trust you," said I hesitating and alarmed: "and yet I would risk any thing, less than my honour, to see this stranger."

"You must decide quickly!" interrupted Lord Arcot in a low voice, and looking round him. I raised my eyes towards the heavens, and fervently exclaimed, "O God! hear and protect me!"

me!" The energetic tone in which I spoke reached Mr. Ashgrove, who was at no great distance. He flew towards us; and seizing Lord Arcot, presented a pistol to his breast. "Attempt no resistance, my Lord!" said he, "or you instantly perish!"

Horror-struck, and scarcely conscious of what I was doing, I shrieked vehemently. My guardian now rushed from the copse, and assisted in securing the terrified Lord Arcot, whose whole frame shook convulsively. "Leave this ruffian to me," said Edward: "he will not dare attempt to escape. Do you, Lord Denmore, take charge of Miss St. Leger." I endeavoured to speak, but articulation was arrested; and I supported myself on my guardian's arm, overpowered by agitation.

I watched Lord Arcot and Mr. Ashgrove till they were out of sight.

“Exert your fortitude,” said Lord Denmore: “you have escaped the machinations of a villain: your childish credulity has exposed you to the insults you have experienced, and nothing less than a miracle could have snatched you from destruction; for, only a few minutes since, I heard two ruffians, on the border of the wood, conversing: their language proved they were assassins, placed there for some infernal purpose.”

“Assassins! Oh, merciful Powers!” said I: “whom did they wait for?”

“They mentioned no name: but one of the scoundrels remonstrated on the act he was bribed to perform.”—“I fear that we shall be detected,” said he; “for if he is armed, murder will ensue; and no good is meant by the large sum which we are promised; besides, we should have touched before we swore to take; for if we do the thing, and then demand

demand our reward, supposing he refuses, who will believe our story?"

"O!" cried the other, "my Lord is too honourable to break his word; and if he does, we can always turn evidence, and blow him up."

"Suppose we tell the person, and say he escaped: we shall save ourselves, and get a double reward into the bargain," interrupted the other; "for the plot is enough to settle my Lord's business, whether it succeeds or not: and as character is a valuable thing, those who have not a right to it, must purchase it at any price; or what will become of such men as my Lord Arcot?"

"As soon as I received this corroboration of what I suspected," continued Lord Denmore, "I resolved on surprising them; and taking the short path along the meadow towards the spot where I had stationed Mr. Ashgrove, I heard your voice: but this is neither a time

nor place for farther conversation: return with me to the Castle." The moon was nearly obscured by a thick cloud, and a shower began to fall: Lord Denmore continued:

"We shall soon be in total obscurity; and darkness will favour the design of those villains, who probably are still lurking at their rendezvous. As he spoke, a sudden gloom nearly involved every object: the shower increased to a torrent of rain and hail: the wind rose keen, and whistled shrilly; and, to augment my terror, a stern voice soon after inquired, "Who passes?"

Without waiting for our answer, two men rushed forward. Lord Denmore discharged a pistol: one of the villains instantly ran off; the other, being slightly wounded, fell on his knees and begged for mercy.

"Spare my life, and I will confess all I know!" cried he with a tremulous voice.

"Oh,

"Oh, Lord Denmore, spare the guilty wretch!" said I.

"Are you armed?" cried my guardian, holding the other pistol to his head.

"Not against you, my Lord!" replied the villain. As he spoke we heard footsteps. Lord Denmore, concluding that the accomplice was returning, prepared for his reception. I now felt arms encircling me. I shrieked. My guardian fired his second pistol: and a voice whispered, "Shall I destroy him?" It was the voice of the traveller.

Lord Denmore now commanded him to surrender: "I do not want your life; I only wish to have your evidence," said he.

"And you shall have it, to your own perdition!" replied the stranger.

"Then come with me to the Castle!" cried Lord Denmore, still holding the wounded ruffian. "My Lord!" said

he, "you need not exert your strength, for I am badly wounded, and ready to attend you."

We proceeded towards the Castle. Lord Denmore led the assassin by the collar: the stranger walked beside us. In the Park we met Mr. Ashgrove: I took his arm; and in a few minutes we reached the portico. My guardian conducted the wounded prisoner across the hall into the library; while Mr. Ashgrove entered another apartment with the traveller; saying to Lord Denmore, "We will interrogate the scoundrels separately." I knew not what to do: my inclinations were bewildered by perplexity: I longed to hear the examination of the traveller, with a full confidence that he would be acquitted; for his behaviour towards me had been so delicately decorous, when I had met him, at times and in places where opportunity might have authorized insult, that he had
strongly

strongly impressed my mind with a prejudice in his favour.

I stopped for a moment to decide: but I had never seen the wounded assassin: the traveller I knew by sight; curiosity was therefore blunted with respect to the latter, while it was rendered doubly keen to hear and to see the former. I entered the library. "Confess all you know," said Lord Denmore; "and I promise to liberate you immediately. What was the motive for your conduct?"

"To secure a person, of whose name and condition we were ignorant," said the trembling culprit.

"For what purpose?" inquired Lord Denmore. The prisoner hesitated.

"To assassinate him!" continued my guardian sternly.

"Not absolutely to commit murder," replied the culprit: "but in case of resistance, to save ourselves. The law

would authorize the death of any man, in a case of self-defence."

"This is what you may call legal provocation, and just resentment; but I consider it as a conspiracy to murder!" The energetic tone of Lord Denmore's voice, while he pronounced these words, alarmed the villain, and he replied:

"I see, my Lord! that you are not to be deceived; therefore you shall know all. We were employed by Lord Arcot to way-lay and to hustle a person whom he had sworn to chastise. Our task was not to end there; for we had engaged to bind him, and to leave him in the wood on the hill-side."

"I can imagine the rest," interrupted my guardian, shuddering: "Lord Arcot would have completed the infernal plan; and yet I cannot guess his motive for such an outrage."

"Then you are dull indeed, my Lord!" cried Lady Melcomb; "for, to
the

the most superficial observer it appears, that this unknown wanderer was a lover of Miss St. Leger's, and consequently a rival of Lord Arcot's."

"To a superficial observer it does appear so," said Miss Stanley: "but I trust that Lord Denmore's depth of penetration will draw forth a more profound reason." Lady Melcomb, who had just sense sufficient to know when she was the object of sarcasm, glanced indignantly at her amiable monitress, but uttered not a syllable.

"Now," said Lord Denmore, "we will examine this knave's accomplice; perhaps he will elucidate the plot more fully;" so saying, he rang the bell; and a servant, who was waiting at the door, instantly entered.

"Desire Mr. Ashgrove and his prisoner to come here," said my guardian. In a moment they appeared before us. The stranger held one hand before his

face; the other was in his bosom. On seeing his figure, the culprit, already examined, started; at the same time exclaiming, "Oh, God! the person we were in search of! the object of Lord Arcot's vengeance!" As he spoke, the traveller drew his hand from before his face, and looked earnestly at Lord Denmore; who, without uttering a syllable, fell on the carpet

The consternation which this sudden event occasioned was undescribable.

"Oh Heavens, Sir!" said I; "who are you?"

"Desire Lord Arcot to appear, and he will tell you," replied the stranger gravely, and with a countenance unmoved.

"That I will undertake," said Mr. Ashgrove, darting out of the library. But Oh, Frances! in a moment he returned with a countenance of horror: "Lord Arcot is dead!" cried he: "I found

found him in the saloon, bathed in his own blood—a poniard——”

Miss Stanley shrieked and fainted. The sensibility of her soul felt for the dreadful fate of even a divorced husband. The traveller requested permission to depart: “I have a lodging in the village,” said he; “and when Lord Denmore is prepared to see me, he will find me at the yellow cottage, near the summit of the hill.” The mild yet manly demeanour which he displayed; the firm yet unassuming tone of voice in which he spoke; added to a figure prepossessing, manners the most polished, and a countenance open and benignant, took from every hearer’s mind the faintest shadow of suspicion, when the suborned conspirator, falling on his knees, caught his hand, and earnestly entreated his forgiveness.

“Lord Arcot’s blood has sealed your pardon,” said the traveller. He now bowed and left us.

My guardian's situation, and the dreadful deed which terminated Lord Arcot's guilty life, divided our attention. My bosom, Frances! throbbed with anxiety for the former, at the same moment that it thrilled with horror, when I reflected on the precipitation with which the latter had plunged into eternity, even at a moment when his soul, already charged with an infinity of crimes, was blackened with premeditated murder. The idea was terrible! and the magnitude of its power over the feeling mind, wrapped every beholder in gloomy meditation.

Lord Denmore was led to his chamber in a state of mental stupor, which threw a benumbing spell over his senses. He looked around him with a vacant aspect, which bespoke a derangement of intellect dreadful to contemplate; and the last words which he uttered as he quitted the library were, "Unhappy Gertrude!" I attended him to the door

of his chamber ; and when his servant closed it, I fancied it was the entrance of a sepulchre, which he was doomed never to re-pass again.

I retired to my own apartment. I employed the midnight-hour, before the bust of Lord Denmore, in writing this long letter : and it is just at the approach of day-break when I subscribe myself your affectionate but unhappy Friend.

LETTER CIX.

The Same to the Same.

October 2, 1797.

THIS morning, as soon as I had closed my last letter, I stole from my chamber, intending to let myself out, and to go in search of the traveller. My curiosity
was

was raised to impatience ; and I could not rest tranquil while events wore so mysterious an aspect. The deportment and language of my unknown monitor presented so much suavity of manners, at the same time inspiring such thorough confidence in his truth and integrity, that I resolved once more to see him, and to solicit an explanation of his conduct.

For this purpose, I embraced a moment when the Castle was perfectly still. The dawn had just began to appear, and the thick atmosphere cast a cold gloom on every object. The whole night had been stormy, and the wind made the old turrets shake, while the long casements rattled in every direction. As I passed Lord Denmore's chamber, I stopped to listen. My heart beat high ; and my apprehensions were considerably increased by the profound silence which reigned within. After I had waited a few moments, I heard the lock gently turned ;
and,

and, concealing myself in a recess on the landing-place, I saw Miss Stanley, with Patty, quitting the apartment. They were both in tears. I followed them up stairs to the second floor of the Castle, and inquired how my guardian had passed the night.

“ Alas, Gertrude !” said Miss Stanley, “ it is in vain to oppose the decrees of destiny : the attachments of the heart are not to be subdued ; and it is evident that you are the object of Lord Denmore’s affections. He has, even in his present state of mind, talked of you incessantly.” I listened with that attention which proved how gratifying such intelligence was to my feelings. I could have flown to his chamber, and upon my knees have blessed him for remembering a forlorn and ill-fated being, who had at that period scarcely a visionary hope to solace her afflictions.

“ Gertrude !”

“ Gertrude !” continued Miss Stanley, “ I shall quit the Castle the moment that Lord Denmore is convalescent. I will no longer accept attentions which originated in pique ; conscious that he proposed an union with me at a time when he was misguided by a transient resentment. He now finds himself bound by the strong impulse of honourable feeling : he fancies that his integrity would be sullied by a deviation from those laws which society first established, and which a dread of the world’s censure has rendered permanent : but it is my duty to release him from engagements in which his heart was never consulted : engagements, prompted by an opinion at once false and injurious to your felicity.” She held my hand while she spoke ; and her features, though they retained nothing of their characteristic vivacity, were softened into a benignant expression, which soothed and penetrated the

the heart. After a silence of some minutes, she again addressed me :

“ I conjure you,” said she with a deep-drawn sigh ; “ I conjure you to tranquillize your soul : you have many trials yet to encounter : this stranger’s visit fills my mind with a variety of conjectures. At all events, Lord Denmore’s present state of health will not admit of any explanatory interview : you have only to evince patience and fortitude.” She seemed faint and exhausted ; she embraced me kindly ; and, after an ineffectual effort to reply, I quitted the apartment.

I again hastened towards the hall. All there was silent as the grave. The weather continued tempestuous, and the rain poured in torrents : my footsteps seemed to echo as I trod the marble pavement ; and with caution I unfastened the hall-door which led to the portico : the current of wind which entered, forced open
that

that of the saloon, where the corpse of Lord Arcot remained, as it was found, upon the sofa. The shutters were nearly closed; but they admitted light sufficient to present the terrifying object, exactly opposite the entrance of the apartment. While I stood, as if petrified with horror, I heard a rattling noise, which was followed by a loud knock at the door of the portico. At first it startled me; but on opening it, I perceived Lord Melcomb's chaise, with four horses, which waited to convey his Lordship and Lady Melcomb from the scene of affliction.

The violence of the wind and rain made me, for a moment, undecided what course to take; and while I was pondering, anxious to depart, and fearful of re-passing the door of the saloon, I saw Lord and Lady Melcomb crossing the hall, evidently dressed for travelling.

“Adieu,

“Adieu, Gertrude!” said Lady Melcomb: “we are going: make our excuses to Lord Denmore and Miss Stanley; and assure them, that when the Castle is once more a scene of tranquillity, we shall await their summons; but as we can be of no service to either, in the present state of affairs, we think it most prudent to depart.” They were stepping into the chaise, when Lady Melcomb added, “Do not forget, child, to tell Lord Denmore and Miss Stanley, that it will afford me exquisite delight to hear soon that they are married.” The chaise drove from the portico; and the rain having somewhat abated I set out towards the village.

The conduct of Lord and Lady Melcomb presented a finished picture of modern friendship—that downy phantom, which hovers round the happy; but which, at the approach of sorrow, takes wing, and is seen no more. Alas,
Frances!

Frances! how many of these flattering visions have I beheld in my journey of sublunary trials! How soothing, how deceptive have I found them! How were they dressed in smiles when Fortune's sunny hour shone splendid! and how suddenly did they vanish when the approaching storm lowered on my prospects.

Lady Melcomb's last message to Lord Denmore fully displayed the mean and malignant spirit which had perpetually actuated her mind in every thing that concerned my happiness. She had never permitted an opportunity to escape wherein she could either humble or afflict me. It had uniformly been her pleasure to wound my feelings, by inuendoes shrewd and sarcastic; or by conveying to my ear those little tales of envy and ill-nature, which, though they cannot sting the bosom conscious of integrity, afford the contaminated heart a
source

source of endless triumph : for it has ever been, in my opinion, an unequivocal proof of an infernal nature, to seek occasions, by direct or indirect assertion, to wound, with wanton inhumanity, an already lacerated bosom : and yet there are beings who, under the mask of friendship, strike securely ; and, while they assume the complacency of sympathy, dart their envenomed stings to humble and to torture. Give me, Frances, the friend who will promote the harmony of my feelings ; who will unfold the pleasing dream of hope to my sickening fancy ; and, with the caution of philanthropic zeal, keep from my knowledge those ills that would afflict me.

Absorbed in rumination, I reached the yellow cottage which the traveller had made his temporary residence. The casements were still closed ; and in the lowly habitation every thing seemed tranquil.

tranquil. The storm had abated; the broken clouds dispersed; and the sun darted its brilliant rays with more than common lustre. Every thing in the vegetating world seemed refreshed by the copious showers which had fallen during the night; and even my nearly broken heart throbbed with the resuscitating breath of morning. After waiting near half an hour, as I opened the little gate, the traveller came to meet me. His countenance was sad; his mien dejected.

“Forgive this early intrusion,” said I.

“Make no apologies,” interrupted he with a smile of cordiality: “I wished to see you; and was going to the Castle for that purpose.” He took my hand; and we entered the cottage, where a wood-fire was already kindled, and breakfast on the table. The traveller reached me a chair; and taking one himself, we seated ourselves without uttering another syllable. Several minutes
had

had elapsed, when my companion resumed the conversation.

“ Lord Arcot’s death,” said he, “ demands that I should be explicit. It is now near fifteen years since a friend of mine first knew him. Their acquaintance commenced in Asia, where they were equally favoured by the smiles of Fortune. On his departure for England, this friend entrusted to his care a considerable portion of his property : not only in remittances of money, but in jewels of the highest value. By letters, which he received the year after Lord Arcot’s arrival in Europe, he was assured that his commission had been executed with care and punctuality ; and that the person to whom the treasures had been consigned was grateful for them. By every safe opportunity which presented itself, these gifts were largely augmented ; till the giver began
to

to wonder at that silence, which even in a stranger would have been culpable."

"Does the generous friend still live?" said I.

"He was alive when I left India," replied the traveller; "but his constitution was much broken by incessant melancholy: for all the gifts of Fortune cannot obliterate the remembrance of past happiness, or the consciousness of present sorrow."

"Why was he unhappy?" said I.

"His story may be briefly told," replied the traveller. "In early life he married: his wife was young and beautiful: the union was formed by the relatives of both parties; and though my friend adored the object of their choice, her affections were devoted to another.

"One year had scarcely elapsed, after their marriage, when, being ordered upon foreign service, Sir William quit-
ted

ted England. He left his wife then pregnant ; and the precarious state of her health, at that period, furnished a plausible excuse for her refusing to accompany him. Many an anxious night did he wake, and mourn in painful rumination : many a day passed on, and not even a line of remembrance came to inform him of her welfare." He paused, and looked earnestly at me. I sighed in sympathy with the traveller's story. He continued :

" Sir William's services raised him high in his profession : and it was on the eve of his return to Britain that he received intelligence which nearly completed his despair. His wife was dead ! The darling of his hopes was torn from his aching heart for ever !

" Sir William returned to England. Every inquiry respecting his lost wife proved fruitless. She had passed her days in total seclusion ; and the place of

her death had been kept a profound secret. Sir William, by the fortunate chance of war, was thought deserving of his country's favour. He was created a Knight of the Bath, and appointed to an important station at Bengal, where he first became acquainted with Lord Arcot."

As the stranger related the sorrows of his friend, my spirits were depressed almost to fainting. He perceived the effect which sympathy produced, and would have deferred the conclusion of the story till some future period; but I conjured him to go on.

"Six years passed before Sir William heard that shortly after his separation from his wife, she was delivered of a daughter; that the infant was beautiful as her departed mother." The traveller again paused, and sighed deeply.

"A report had been circulated that Sir William was also dead: and every inquiry after the supposed orphan, during

ring several years, proving unsuccessful, her father at length concluding that he had been misinformed, dropped the pursuit; till, four years since, he was again assured that his child was living, and in Ireland." I endeavoured to speak, but could not: he proceeded.

" Lord Arcot was commissioned, on his return to Europe, to find this darling offspring: to place her in a situation becoming the rank and fortune of Sir William; and to unfold to her the secret, that she had *still a father*. From time to time Lord Arcot wrote to India that the object of his care was well and happy. But, alas! what were her parent's sorrows, when he heard that this child of his bosom, this source of all his anxiety, was the avowed mistress of the very man who had been the idol of her mother's affections."

" Heavenly Powers !" exclaimed I.

Q 2

" Yes !"

“ Yes!” added the traveller, grasping my wrist and looking sternly at me :
“ of *The False Friend* ! the infamous Lord Denmore !”

I shrieked, and fell into the stranger’s arms. During several moments I had not power to look up : but when I summoned resolution, Oh, Frances ! language cannot describe the expression of his features : his eyes were full of tears : his lips quivered : and his lowering brow was covered with the starting drops which the agitated brain extracted from the heart. I knew not by what title to address him. Hope would have prompted the dear, the interesting name of father : but fear seemed to freeze the word upon my tongue, and to lock its powers in silence.

“ I behold,” said the traveller,
“ with anguish I behold the conflicts
you are endeavouring to subdue. There
is

is no time to lose in fastidious ceremony. I am authorized to question you without reserve ; and I demand that unequivocal confession which will either give you to an anxious parent's longing and eager arms, or consign you, an alien from his bosom, to misery and dishonour."

" Not to *dishonour* ! To misery, to sorrow, to dependence, he may consign me ; but dishonour never shall disgrace my name."

" To dependence he cannot give you. Your fortune is immense. You possess it in right of your dead mother, Gertrude St. Leger."

" Support me, O God !" said I ;
" and suffer me once to behold this dear, this unknown father : he will not, when I throw myself into his bosom, cast me off unheard or unacquitted : he will trace, in my fading features, the resemblance of my lost mother : for her sake he will love me."

“ For your own, Gertrude !” interrupted the stranger : “ he will require no secondary motive for holding you to his heart, if you are still worthy.”

“ Prove me,” said I ; “ prove my claim to his protection, before I see him ; before I bathe him with tears of joy, of filial fondness. Alas, Sir ! I have long been devoted to misfortune : I have been taught to know an orphan’s misery ; and I fear that the excess of happiness will overwhelm my senses.”

“ Heaven forbid !” sighed the stranger.

“ Then let us fly ! let us find him, if he still lives !” said I.

“ He will not acknowledge you till you are acquitted ; therefore be confident and candid. What are your engagements to Lord Denmore ?”

“ The bonds of pure and honourable love, bestowed in the voluntary fullness of my heart, and sanctioned by the hope of possessing his affections.”

“ Whence

“ Whence did that hope arise ?”

“ From repeated proofs of tenderness and generosity : from professions, persuasive as they were correct : from an interest too warm, too zealous to be mistaken.”

“ These may be the delusions of self-love,” replied the stranger : “ the phantoms of youthful vanity : for the distinction which Lord Denmore bears, and which surpasses all the adventitious gifts of rank or fortune, is that of an honourable and philanthropic nature. These rare perfections rendered him dear to your father’s heart ; and though he knew that your mother loved him, almost to idolatry, he never harboured a thought that could stigmatize his name with falsehood. He hoped, Gertrude, on his return to England, to find his long severed friend all that he once proved him.”

“ And who has been so vile, so infamous, as to interrupt their friendship ?”

“ Lord Arcot !” replied the stranger : “ he reported the dreadful tale which I told you : and, by his desire, I came hither to meet him, and to demand an explanation. But the plot which Lord Arcot had formed against my life, and the treachery he exemplified in embezzling your father’s property, lead me to hope that Lord Denmore has been slandered. It now only rests with you to prove whether or no he has deceived you.”

“ That I believed he loved me, is unquestionable,” answered I. “ Here is my authority.” I now presented the stranger Lord Denmore’s letter, which I received at the time when Lady Denmore was supposed to have died, in consequence of her having swallowed poison. He read it twice attentively *.

* *Vide* vol. i. p. 285.

“ What

“What was Lord Denmore’s conduct subsequent to this letter: and how has he conducted himself towards you since it was written?” said the stranger.

“Sometimes with affection, bordering on idolatry; at others with the most unkind neglect. I have often, in absence, endeavoured to forget him: but his returning tenderness as frequently recalled my heart to endure a new trial of its feelings.”

“Capricious, wanton cruelty!” exclaimed the stranger: “but his tyranny shall end: his motive shall be developed: and if he has dared entertain an hope derogatory to your honour, or dangerous to your repose, he shall not live to accomplish it.” I now turned my eyes towards the window, from which I saw Mr. Ashgrove and Miss Stanley approaching. A little garden at the back of the cottage opened to a wood on the skirts of the village. I bade the

stranger farewell; and promising to be with him again at the close of evening, hastened unseen to the Castle.

I found that Lord Denmore was somewhat more composed; that the powers of recollection had returned; and that he had written a note to the traveller. The perturbed state of my mind may easily be imagined. You shall, nevertheless, hear from me again soon, if I am alive.

LETTER CX:

LORD MELCOMB *to* MISS STANLEY.

London, October 3, 1797.

By letters which I have just received from the sea-coast, I learn that a vessel which sailed from Yarmouth for Lisbon
some

some short time since, met with the following disastrous destiny : Three days after the passengers had lost sight of Britain they were pursued and attacked by a French frigate. The superior force of the enemy presented no hope of escaping ; and, after a severe contest, the English ship was preparing to surrender : the waves ran high, and the wind prevented the possibility of either vessel bearing a single sail. After rocking between a tremendous swell of the sea ; and at intervals rising on the high and roaring mountains, which almost encountered the black and tempestuous sky, on a sudden the crew of the English ship discovered that she had taken fire. In a few moments the deep and stormy expanse was visible, as if the demons of revenge conspired to make the scene more dreadful. It was now midnight. A few of the passengers put out the boat, and had the good fortune to reach

the enemy's ship, which was at some distance. The wind increased to an hurricane : the vessel burnt with resistless fury : the white foam was illumined by the brightness of the flames ; and amidst the howling of the elements the cries of the unhappy sufferers were heard distinctly. On the deck stood the libertine Somerton, supporting on one arm the terrified and shrieking Lady Arcot. An English officer, who had escaped from the floating hell, intreated permission to venture back, if any of the crew would accompany him. Six British sailors volunteered the enterprise. The wreck was now one blazing mass, which, governed by the tempestuous surge, was borne to whichever point the wind directed it. Still they persevered ; till, just as the boat came within hearing of the vessel, a wide yawning wave engulfed her : she disappeared ; and all was darkness.

The

The sea now ran mountains high : the returning boat laboured with the storm till it reached the frigate ; where the crew, with that humanity which will never fail to attend true courage, by throwing ropes to their assistance, saved their gallant enemies. One of the passengers, preserved in the first escape, was Mrs. Blonzely, who had taken her departure for Lisbon under the protection of Lady Arcot. From her my correspondent learnt the names and rank of the persons who had perished ; and he also, at her request, dispatched to me the letter which so forcibly describes the terrible catastrophe.

By the same account I also find, that intelligence of the English vessel's having sailed from Yarmouth was received by the captain of the French frigate, from Mrs. Ferret, who had long been a spy in the enemy's service. Mrs. Blonzely survived the terror and fatigue of the

disaster only a few hours; when her remains were consigned to the fathomless abyss, where Somerton and Lady Arcot had sunk before her.

Lady Melcomb desired me to give you this intelligence; and at the same time to assure Miss St. Leger, that she sincerely sympathizes in her regrets for the fate of Mr. Somerton.

Yours, &c.

MELCOMB.

LETTER CXI.

GERTRUDE *to* FRANCES.

October 4, 1797.

It is impossible to describe the anxiety of my mind while I await the result of Lord Denmore's conference with the stranger.

stranger. The interval, though perplexed with uncertainties, originating in hopes that are perpetually baffled by apprehensions, allows time for an infinity of reflection. I retrace the intricacy of my fate: I am now able to account for a variety of events which, till within a few days, have appeared wholly inexplicable. The constant persecutions of Mr. Somerton were now evidently the effect of his knowledge, that Fortune had bestowed on me her most abundant favours; a secret which, in a moment of mistaken confidence, my guardian had reposed in his bosom: so dangerous is it for a liberal and ingenuous mind to place its peace, its happiness, in the power of those whose friendship has not been tried by that never-failing ordeal, Adversity. I now begin to find that professions of esteem are the mere vapours of imagination: that the smiles of mankind are regulated by that never-failing thermometer,

meter, fortune : that generosity and disinterested affection are seldom rewarded : that those beings who may hope for felicity in this worldly scene of selfish gratification, must steel their hearts against every noble and liberal sentiment : and whether borne down by the torrent of misfortune, or wafted on the soothing gales of prosperity, they must forget the claims of their fellow-creatures, or submit to be the scoff of an ill-judging multitude ; the dupes of their own feelings ; the unpitied examples of a too generous credulity.

I find by Mr. Ashgrove's conversation, that the wound with which Somerton languished, when I saw him at the manor-house, was received from him. The libertine then only escaped destruction, because he was reserved for a more awful, a more terrible example of that justice, which atrocity like his, however sanctioned by mankind, will sooner or later inevitably exhibit.

Alas,

Alas, Frances! how does my heart shudder when I recollect the conversation which I had with Mrs. Walters concerning the then inexplicable language of Lord Denmore; respecting the sorrows of Gertrude St. Leger. My mother's name was that which I bear. Oh Heavens! who knows but the murdered angel to whom he hoped soon to be united for ever, whose fatal affection had been the destruction of his happiness—who knows, but—

I dare not think it possible—I should despair—my brain would madden.

The pale vision which in his frantic sorrow he beheld, might it not have been the bust—the resemblance of my lost mother? *Lost!* Oh, Frances! there is something prophetic in that word.

This traveller! How busy is conjecture! and yet how torturing! I have a thousand times examined the portrait of
my

my father, which I still wear: there is not a single trait of the stranger's countenance; and yet I cannot rest satisfied: time and climate may have so changed him, that the glow of juvenility, having yielded to the withering power of sorrow, perhaps leaves the portrait without one trace of what he was at the period when it was painted.

I will not indulge so flattering a chimaera: I will not suffer my aching heart even to hope that this traveller, this amiable, this interesting stranger, is my father.

A few hours will elucidate every mystery. I grow feeble with anxiety at the moment when I should feel strong in fortitude. Frances! till noon has passed I bid you farewell.

Evening.

The traveller met me as he entered the Castle. Lord Denmore being engaged in writing, I passed a few minutes
with

with him alone in the saloon. Oh Frances ! he is my father ! my dear, my long lost, my hitherto unknown parent ! He has, in confidence, avowed that which his generous heart could no longer hold a secret. I am wild with joy ! I am incapable of describing my sensations ! He has enjoined me not to discover what he has told me : and I conclude that his interview with Lord Denmore will put a period to all my sorrows.

Midnight.

My father passed three hours in conversation with Lord Denmore ; and on his departure, left the following note for me : I was in my chamber with Miss Stanley.

“ Lord Denmore now knows that I
“ was once his friend : and a few hours
“ will decide whether or not he still
“ deserves that title. Tranquillize your
“ mind,

“ mind, my dearest Gertrude, and rest
“ confident, that you have a parent still,
“ who will either defend your reputa-
“ tion, and restore your felicity, or fall
“ in the experiment.”

I read this laconic note to Miss Stanley: she changed colour, and in a few moments became pale as ashes. Ah, Frances! if this amiable woman loves Lord Denmore, what a part am I acting. She has left me these two hours; but I shall see her again before I sleep.

Day-break.

I have had a long conversation with Miss Stanley. Her words and manner were undescribably impressive: “ You must not soothe your mind with false and flattering hopes,” said she; “ you deceive yourself: I have questioned Lord Denmore upon the subject since last I saw you; and I know that he can never marry you.”

“ Indeed,”

"Indeed," said I sighing, "after his engagements to you, he ought not."

"I wave my claim upon his heart," replied Miss Stanley: "Indeed that has been my determination ever since the day of my arrival at the Castle: but he had another prior engagement, which he can never violate."

"Another!" said I earnestly.

"Another," repeated Miss Stanley with a look both penetrating and sorrowful: "Lord Denmore has deceived us all: he is unworthy of your affection." Her tone of voice was agitated and trembling.

"Explain your meaning!" interrupted I: "for Heaven's sake explain it."

"That task I leave to Sir William St. Leger," replied Miss Stanley.

"My father!"

"Yes, Gertrude! your father will unravel this perplexing web of destiny:
await

await the hour with patience : your father has been—”

“ What ? ”

“ A wretch most criminal ! yet most entitled to our pity.”

“ Impossible ! ” said I : “ he seems the very worthiest of mortals.”

“ Men are rarely what they seem,” replied Miss Stanley : “ compose your spirits, for you have yet a trial to encounter.”

“ Another trial ! Oh God ! ” exclaimed I, “ when will this scene of sorrow terminate ? ”

“ Very shortly,” answered Miss Stanley : “ endeavour to evince your fortitude : I will not quit you till something is decided.”

“ What ? Ah ! tell me ; tell me, lest suspense should drive me frantic ! ”

“ The stranger has deceived you.”

Miss

Miss Stanley has received a message from Lord Denmore: he is already in the library: I close my letter. Frances, farewell!"

LETTER CXII.

Miss STANLEY to FRANCES MONTGOMERY.

Denmore Castle, October 5, 1797.

THE hour of retribution has at length arrived: the arm of an injured husband has annihilated a FALSE FRIEND; and the ill-fated Gertrude has now NO FATHER!

I cannot find language to describe the scene which has passed since the unhappy orphan closed her last letter: I can only briefly inform you, that the explanation

planation which took place proved that the offspring of Sir William St. Leger died soon after its birth; and that Gertrude was not born till near two years after his departure from England. Compunction so deeply preyed upon her mother's heart, that a very few months closed her scene of sorrow.

In this Castle she expired: in the presence of Lord Denmore she resigned her last breath, after most solemnly enjoining him never to disclose the origin or prospects of their infant to herself, till she should attain the age of eighteen; and not even *then*, if by any action of her life she should prove unworthy.

From the period of her mother's death Lord Denmore has never known one hour of happiness: he has wandered from place to place, sad, weary of existence, and devoted to torturing rumination. In early life he was the gayest of the gay: in the splendid scenes of polished

lished society, the most accomplished, the most admired of mortals: but from the hour which deprived him of the darling of his bosom, the most decided melancholy, bordering at times on a cynical austerity, has marked his character. He loved the victim of his idolatry even to enthusiasm: but her husband was his friend: and the nice honour of his bosom perpetually struggled with the passion which enthralled it. The whole tenor of his mind changed into sadness. The lovely partner of his heart had beheld the ravages of compunctious feeling; and while she endeavoured to participate in his affliction, she sunk imperceptibly beneath the magnitude of her own.

When Gertrude had completed her education, her unhappy father anticipated a new trial of his fortitude: he nevertheless considered it his duty to emancipate her from obscurity; and to

prepare her, by an intercourse with the world, for the splendid fortune which, in her mother's right, she was destined to inherit. She had ever been considered as the daughter of Major St. Leger, who was supposed to have died when she was an infant. On her arrival at the Castle, the likeness which she presented of her lost mother, nearly annihilated Lord Denmore: and awakening all those pangs which time and the busy scenes of life had taught to slumber, they assuming a new and torturing power, became more terrible than ever. The strong emotions of his soul were frequently witnessed by Gertrude; though she was unconscious of their origin as of her own sad destiny; while even the fond paternal feelings of a nearly-broken heart, aided in the fatal mystery to complete her sorrows.

The affection which Gertrude has long cherished for Lord Denmore, and the intricacies

intricacies which have attended its progress, at length rendered a full explanation absolutely necessary. Calumny had been the shield which Lord Arcot adopted for the concealment of his own villany : and the situation in which the object whom he had defrauded was placed, but too powerfully tended to confirm his story. Sir William returned to Europe for the purpose of investigating the mystery ; and, on his arrival, supposing that Lord Denmore had fascinated her affections with the most dishonourable motives, resolved on compelling him to marry her ; or on sacrificing his own existence, in the defence of her repose and reputation. Lord Denmore refused to explain, under the idea of intimidation : they met at day-break : and the liberal, the generous Denmore, whose life, excepting in ONE instance only, has been an example of philanthropy, virtue, and integrity, paid the full forfeit of his

error, at the moment that he confessed himself the father of Gertrude St. Leger.

Previous to his meeting Sir William, he entrusted to my care the packet which occasioned so much inquietude to his unhappy daughter. It was composed of a variety of letters from the late Duchess of Aldborough to Lady Denmore, and her answers; with the mysterious paper which had been dropped by Lord Denmore, and found by his wife, shortly after Gertrude's arrival at the Castle. It also contained a lock of hair, curiously braided, which was considered as an additional proof of her supposed criminality. Alas! these were *her mother's*! and, at the particular request of our dear unhappy friend, I preserve them for you. She is scarcely in her senses. It is in vain that I would offer consolation; for grief of such magnitude as her's can only find a solace in the full indulgence of its emotions.

Mr.

Mr. Ashgrove had received orders to join his ship ; and departed only a few hours before the fatal rencontre. Sir William, as soon as a tribunal of honour has pronounced his destiny, returns to India.

Farewel. I am certain that you will sincerely sympathize in the misfortunes of our friend ; while, in her eventful history, you will read the dangerous consequences of DOMESTIC TREACHERY. You will also perceive the miseries attendant on that want of CANDOUR, which, while it envelopes the fate of an illegitimate offspring in perpetual mystery, exposes the unconscious sufferer to the vicissitudes of a world, where the INNOCENT are too often punished for the vices of the GUILTY.

Frances ! let the OMNIPOTENCE OF TRUTH rule all your actions ; and rest assured, that the monitor, Conscience,

will never fail to console you, alike in the gaudy scenes of prosperous fortune, and in the darkest paths of sorrow and adversity.

LETTER CXIII.

The Same to the Same.

October 10, 1797.

LAST night the for ever tranquil bosom of Gertrude St. Leger was deposited in the monument of the Denmore family. Her exhausted spirit could not bear to linger in this scene of suffering; and therefore fled to unite with its lost parents. On the evening of that day which terminated the existence of Lord Denmore, Gertrude stole from her chamber;

ber; and just at the still and solemn close of twilight, when Nature's self seemed to mark the melancholy hour, she was discovered, by her ever-watchful friend poor Patty, reclined at the foot of the ivy bench, cold, pale, and lifeless! Her persecuted soul had taken wing; her heart was broken.

By the side of Lord Denmore's ashes, *hers* are deposited. The last gleam of the setting sun shone on the gloomy cavalcade. The tears of a lamenting multitude consecrated her memory: and the venerable Rector paid the last sacred tribute to THE VICTIM OF SENSIBILITY!

F I N I S.

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